GROW
GATHER
PRESS
CREATE

the pressed flower HANDBOOK

SARAH HOLLAND
MEADOW AND THYME

Simple Methods for Connecting with Nature and Preserving the Beauty of the Garden through the Seasons

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▶ Description

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SARAH HOLLAND
Meadow and Thyme

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INTRODUCTION

Flowers are delicate, yet strong; fleeting, yet memorable; beautiful, yet humble. They have an unwavering ability to bring us together; a universal language reminding us that there is wonder to be found everywhere and that the soft embrace of nature unites us all. Flowers are a perfect way to portray a message to someone, especially when we find it difficult to put our feelings into words.

Plants are a true symbol of resilience and a reminder of the strength we all hold within. To grow a plant and provide the right conditions to create and nurture life is such an uplifting activity. Growing either a single plant or a whole garden encourages patience and care and is a truly enriching experience. Pressing a flower stops time. Isn't that incredible? It gives us a way to pause and preserve the ephemerality of a natural form. Flower pressing allows us to see greater depths in our surroundings, to sense that we are part of something bigger, and to feel grateful for the splendour all around us. The simple actions of growing, gathering, pressing, and creating with flowers allows us space to breathe, to reflect, to slow down, and to reconnect with nature.

The Pressed Flower Handbook has been written to guide you through the mindful process of traditional flower pressing, teaching you the best flowers to press alongside simple techniques and tips for achieving stunning pressings. Additionally, you'll be equipped with the skills needed to make lovely creations using your pressed flowers, with some wonderful seasonal step-by-step projects for you to follow. There'll also be gorgeous snippets from my wildlife garden throughout the book, which is where I grow all of the flowers I use in my artwork.

I hope that, like me, you'll fall deeply in love with this timeless craft, and in turn it will open up a whole new world of awe and appreciation for the wild, for simplicity, and for quiet comfort and slow living. Working with flowers has changed my life for the better in so many ways, and to be able to share my knowledge, my garden, and my floral creations with you is

a dream come true. My ambition for this book is that it feels like a gentle hug, a love letter to nature, a companion you can rely on when you need a calming moment, and a source of inspiration that encourages you to express your creativity, naturally.

CHAPTER 01

Forever Flowers

RECONNECTING WITH NATURE

Life is beautiful. However, it can also leave us feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and demotivated. Existing day to day can be fast-paced to the point where we feel out of control, and it is all too easy to forget to embrace the simple pleasures in life. Actions such as sitting quietly outside, watching clouds gently changing shape in the sky, listening to birdsong, taking in the scent of a flower, or breathing in the fresh morning air can have a profoundly positive impact on our health, and yet many of us are so busy *existing* that we are forgetting to *live*.

All of these gentle activities have one key thing in common—they are all accessible ways for us to connect with nature. Numerous studies tell us that feeling connected to nature has a proven positive impact on our mental and physical health. Yet, still many of us neglect this act of self-love, making excuses, saying we don't have the time or the energy, and repeatedly putting the needs of others before our own.

Practicing mindfulness, and in particular reconnecting with nature, is something we must actively choose to do. Habits (good or bad!) are easy to make, but at the beginning we do have to work at them for them to form. Of course—for better or worse—formed habits are much harder to break, such as the habit of making excuses as to why we haven't taken some time out for ourselves!

Beautiful wild chicory and common knapweed flowers.

A peaceful moment in the garden in early spring.

I like to refer to healthy habits that are also acts of self-care as rituals. *If you put in the effort to form positive rituals, giving yourself permission to do something for you, then with time they will start to become instinctive—you'll start to recognise when your mind or body needs a calming moment in nature to rest, recharge, and reset.*

When we allow our natural surroundings to embrace us, to guide us, to heal us, the positive impact on our wellbeing begins to shine through. For me, there's no act more mindful, calming, and immersive than pressing flowers.

It combines so many different aspects of self-care, and by definition encourages me to connect deeply with my natural surroundings. In this book, I'll guide you through the wonderful process of pressing flowers in the traditional, slow way, and introduce you to lots of options for expressing your creativity using pressed flowers.

But more than that, through the art of flower pressing, I'll be encouraging you to look deeper, feel deeper, practice patience, see beauty in imperfections, and view your surroundings with a new perspective. Human beings don't just *need* nature—we *are*, inherently, part of nature—and flower pressing is a lovely way for us to rediscover our intrinsic connections with the world around us.

Pressing flowers is a gentle activity that can be enjoyed by everyone. Whilst this book is centred around plants that grow in the temperate climate of the United Kingdom, the principles and methods you'll learn can be applied to almost all parts of the world—anywhere plants grow that are safe and available for picking. It's wonderful to think of a global community of flower-pressers, all capturing unique snapshots in time across our beautiful planet, preserving special memories for the future. Many people I speak to recall cherished childhood moments spent pressing flowers with a parent or grandparent—it seems flowers are particularly adept at helping us to form memories.

A framed artwork celebrating the ephemeral beauty of a wild meadow, featuring buttercups, white clover, corncockles, field scabious, yarrow leaves, and grasses.

WHY FLOWER PRESSING?

Preserving a flower feels like alchemy—it gives us the ability to stop time. Seeing that same flower years later can take us straight back to a special moment. It's particularly heartwarming to be able to press meaningful flowers—perhaps a bloom from a garden that is significant to you, a favourite flower, wedding flowers, farewell flowers, a perfect little daisy picked from the lawn and handed to you by a child. It's such a tender way to capture a magical moment.

Creating with flowers encourages us to reconnect with nature and to see and experience our surroundings with a new sense of amazement and gratitude. Looking at flowers helps to reduce stress and makes us feel happier, and I can think of few better ways to accomplish surrounding yourself with flowers all year round than by pressing and creating with them!

I love teaching others the art of flower pressing, so I regularly run flower-pressing workshops. In the morning, we gather flowers from the gardens of a stunning English manor house and fill a flower press, and in the afternoon, time is spent creating a piece of artwork with my pre-pressed flowers. I can always see everyone visibly relaxing throughout the day, and I often receive feedback telling me the workshop was better than a spa day, boosting wellbeing and providing relaxation and a profound sense of calm. Flower pressing truly is good for the soul. It's difficult to fully explain the positive impact that working with flowers has; whenever I press or create with flowers, I feel uplifted, positive, relaxed, peaceful, and lighter. I really hope you experience this too as you immerse yourself in the world of flower pressing; I firmly believe it is a healing practice with many wonderful benefits to be discovered.

MY FLORAL JOURNEY

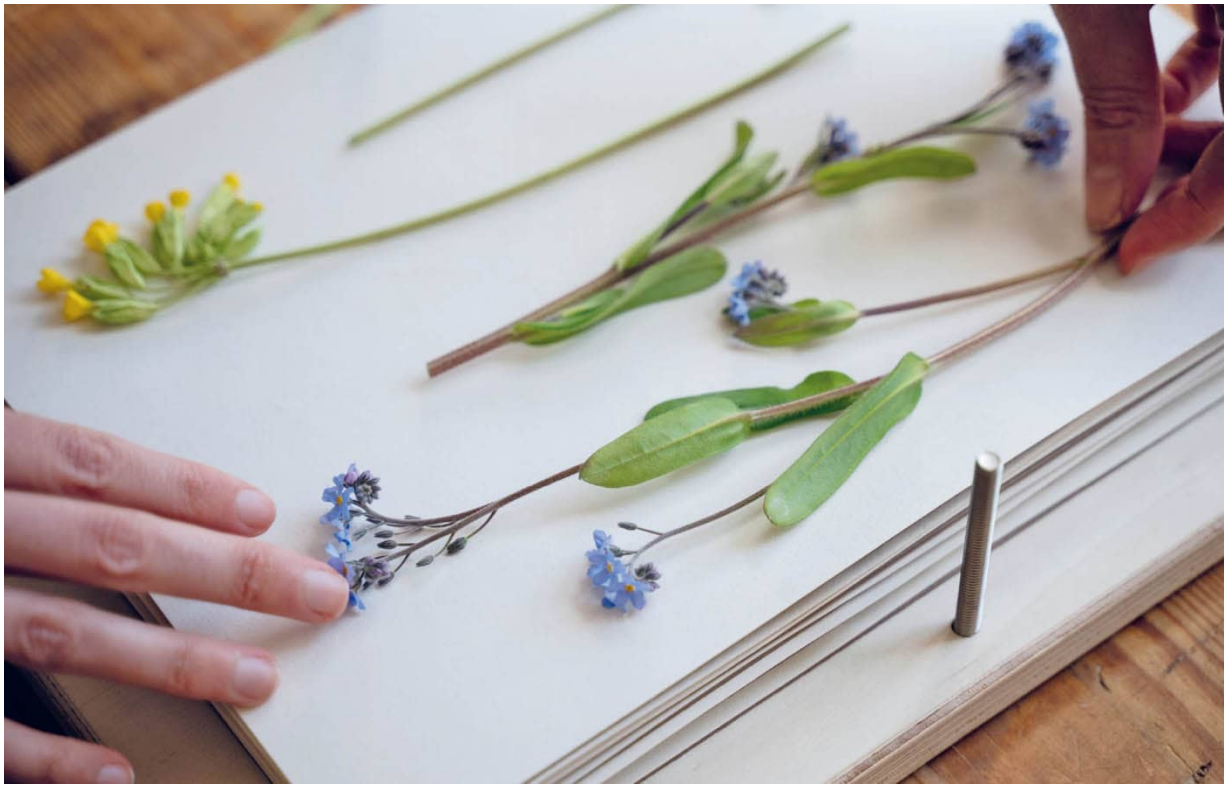
I've always felt deeply connected to nature. As a child, I was endlessly fascinated by the natural world around me, noticing details that many others missed—the iridescence in a dragonfly wing, the sound of a bee busily gathering pollen from inside a foxglove flower, the earthy smell of a forest floor, the tickle of a ladybird walking across my hand. I'm drawn to wild and magical landscapes full of mystery and intrigue.

Of all the glorious wonders of nature, flowers are particularly special for me and have been a constant companion my whole life—my wonderful Granny was a talented florist and she, alongside my lovely Mum, taught me how to press flowers. More than that though, they taught me how to grow, nurture, create with, and truly appreciate all of the incredible features and forms of plants and flowers.

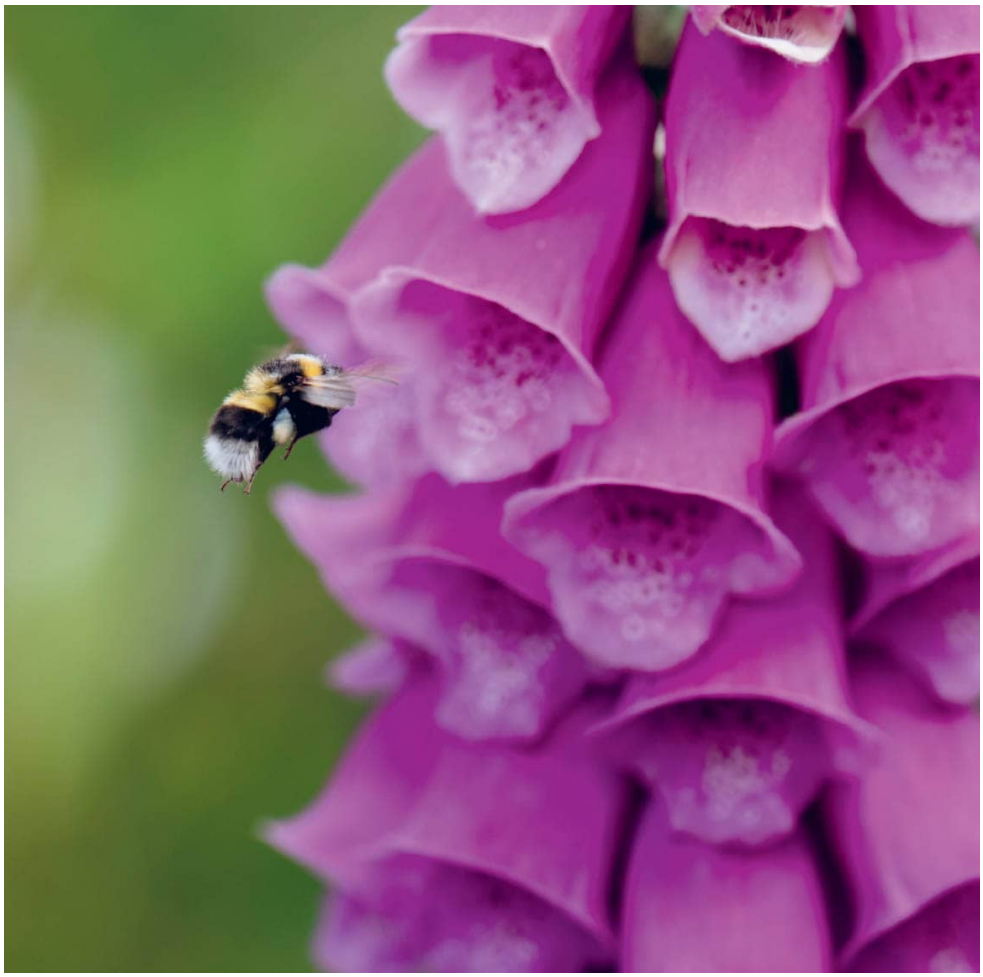
From a very young age I would delight in helping Mum in the garden; I recall I was given my own little patch to take care of in our small suburban garden and adored tending to it. I have fond memories of helping my Granny and Grandpa to water the plants in their vibrant garden in southern England when we'd visit in the summer months, using heavy old watering cans that were far too large for me—water slopping out all over my feet as I carried them. It feels as though I could still reach out and touch the huge overflowing pots full of vivid hot-pink fuchsias in their sun-drenched garden, and the distinctive scent from Grandpa's greenhouse, full of juicy red tomatoes bigger than my hands, will never leave me.

After finishing school, I studied physical geography at university and then started a graduate job as a data analyst. Looking back now, it's clear I was never happy in this role—I felt so very lost spending my days working in a sterile office, staring at a computer screen and suppressing my creativity. In the year leading up to my thirtieth birthday, I became very unwell, and after an emergency stay in hospital I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis: a chronic illness that causes inflammation of the colon and has many challenging side effects, such as fatigue. It became clear to

me that my job and the stress it was causing, combined with my disconnection from nature, was making my illness worse. It was at this point that I decided I needed to reassess, rebalance, and pursue a different way of life. I knew I wanted to do something that allowed me to rediscover nature, and I felt a longing to work with flowers, but at this point I wasn't quite sure exactly what form that would take. I moved house to the Worcestershire countryside in central England and found myself with a larger garden to create and nurture. It felt wonderful, and gardening really helped me to learn that it was okay to dedicate time to myself and do something purely for enjoyment. Time slows down when I'm in the garden, and I always feel restored after spending time outdoors.



Pressing forget-me-nots and cowslips.



A beautiful foxglove.

Me in my sanctuary in the garden, surrounded by nature.

A few years later, my Granny passed away, and I pressed the first tiny vibrant blue forget-me-not flower to bloom in the garden after she died. In this delicate moment, a poignant act of love and grief, I had a profound sense of clarity and knew that my future was destined for the world of floral preservation in the form of flower pressing.

Over the following year, I worked at perfecting the techniques Granny had taught me, building an understanding of all of the nuances of flower pressing, and started to create floral artwork with flowers grown in my garden. It felt so uplifting, and so instinctively *right*. Slowly, my flower-pressing business, Meadow and Thyme, grew, and I was able to quit the

office job. What a feeling! Working for myself means I’m able to manage my health well; I can listen to my body and take slow days when I need them. I’ve seen huge improvements in my ulcerative colitis—it’s still there, as there are no cures as of yet, but it no longer rules me. I’m eternally grateful for the journey I’m on, for both the buzz of the good times and for the lessons I’ve learnt from the difficult times, and it feels so special to work with flowers each day and be able to inspire and teach others about the beautiful art of flower pressing. My Granny lives on in every single flower I press.

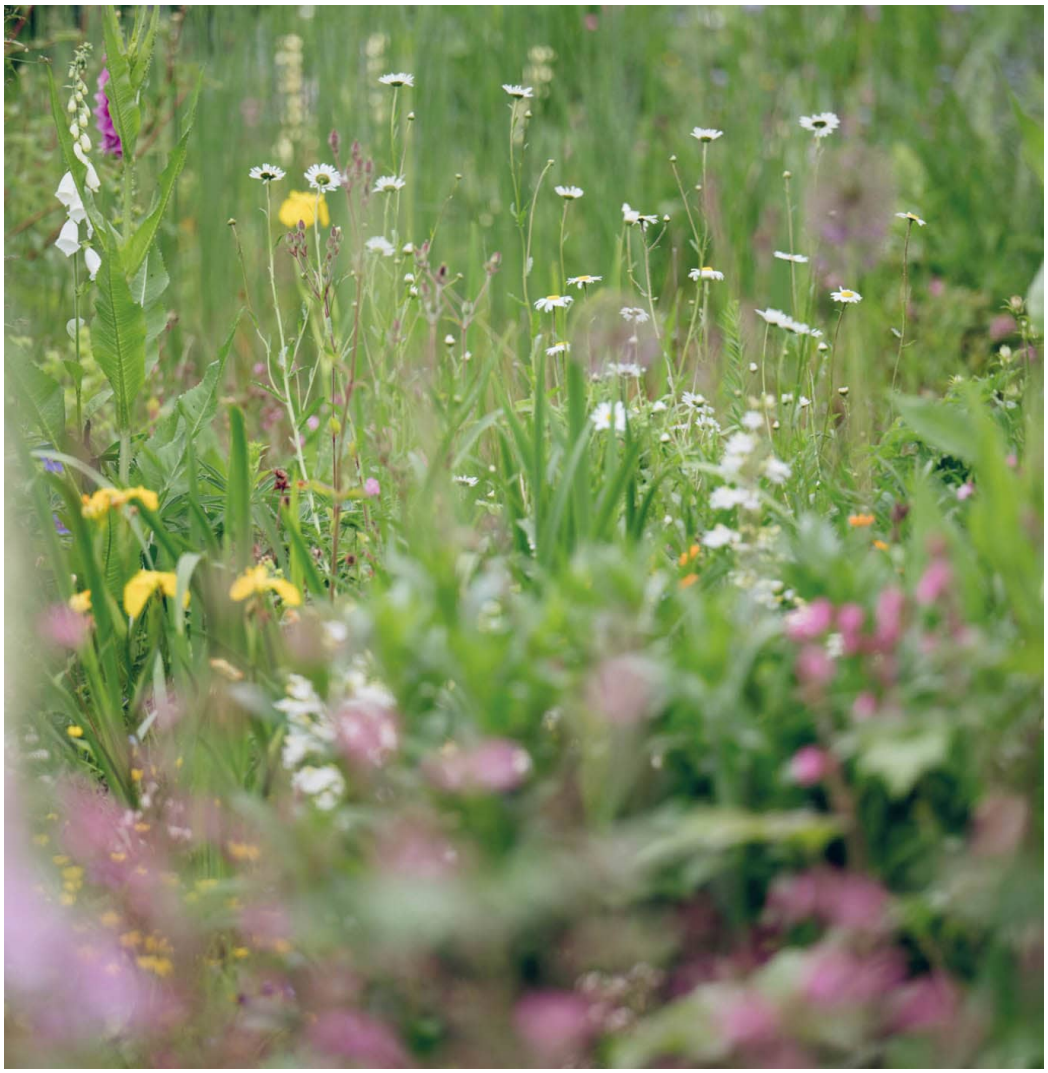
CHAPTER 02

The Meadow and Thyme Garden

A GARDEN FOR FLOWERS AND NATURE

When my partner and I moved to our home in the countryside, the garden was comprised of some wise old trees, unkempt privet hedges, and mud . . . Lots of mud. The blank canvas this provided was part of the appeal, as I knew I'd be able to create a garden that was completely true to my vision.

The wildlife pond is now well established and full of a myriad of flora and fauna.



The garden in May, full of textural layers and teeming with life.

Starting from scratch was both intimidating and exciting in equal measure! The space is long (around 60 metres [197 ft]) and fairly narrow in width (around 7 metres [23 ft]); beyond the welcoming oak and ash trees at the end of my little sanctuary is a field with friendly sheep and lovely views of the countryside beyond.

The very first thing we did in the garden was dig a wildlife pond. It's a good size, around 6 x 4 metres (20 x 13 ft), with shallow edges to allow wildlife to safely use the water and a deeper section in the middle. We dug it during a cold December, using just our trusty garden spade and a lot of determination. As soon as the weather warmed a little, life magically appeared in the water—beetles exploring the depths, and jewels of

frogspawn glistening in the shallows. We planted the pond margins with native plants, and it gets better and better each year.

It's now teeming with life—newts, frogs, dragonflies, damselflies, beetles, birds bathing in the shallows, hedgehogs stopping for a drink at night, and bats skimming the water to pick off insects. We even have regular visits from mesmerising grass snakes, who love to take a dip on really hot days. It really is the heart of the garden—there's so much wildlife around as a result of having the pond. It's also incredibly calming to sit by the pond and just observe—gentle wind-blown ripples on the surface, fairylike flies lit by the golden sunlight dancing overhead, comical newts squabbling over their favourite leaf to hide under, and bees gratefully landing for a refreshing drink.

During the first winter, we also tamed the privet hedge and started to prepare the flower beds. I'm not a fan of the conventional layout of having a lawn with neatly planted borders either side, so instead we created a large flower bed with a simple grass path through the middle, allowing us to feel completely immersed when walking through it. It does mean when I need to do some work in this space I have to carefully climb in amongst the plants, but that's all part of the fun; I've been known to disappear for hours, both physically and metaphorically, whilst working in the flower beds! Each year the garden evolves and grows in ways more beautiful than I could ever have imagined, and at the same time it helps me to heal.

The flower beds are packed full of height, with fennel and teasels taller than me, intermingled with graceful cottage garden flowers—roses, foxgloves, phlox, geraniums, penstemon, and scabious. Hollyhocks gently sway in the breeze, interspersed with understated wildflowers such as delicate buttercups, oxeye daisies, and red campion that attract brightly coloured insects and pollinators. Many of the plants in the garden were gifted from family, friends, and neighbours when they were dividing or thinning out plants in their own gardens—they all know I will always manage to find a space somewhere for any plants that need a home! Knowing that the garden has been shaped by loved ones makes it feel all the more special, and now that the garden is well established, I enjoy paying it forwards by gifting plants to others. The rest of the plants that fill the garden with endless joy were grown from seed—a long process, but oh-so rewarding. It feeds my

soul knowing I've created and nurtured life, and there's something awe-inspiring about planting a seed such as bronze fennel and then greeting a flourishing plant that towers over me a year later.

On warm summer days, hours pass by where I simply sit and breathe deeply, fully immersed in my surroundings: the sound of birdsong; the heady scent of rose, jasmine, and honeysuckle; the colourful patchwork of stunning blooms; busy bees hard at work gathering nectar; butterflies waltzing around me. It fills me with endless happiness and wonder. I feel so grounded in the garden and profoundly connected to nature. I'm truly grateful for the Meadow and Thyme garden—it is the medium for my artwork, a space to unwind, a calming place to help restore my health, and the motivation I need to get outside and feel gratitude, even on days when I don't feel my best.

GENTLE GARDENING

Many of us are lucky enough to have access to a garden or outdoor space—balconies, windowsills, courtyards, communal spaces, small urban gardens, vast rural gardens. Whilst it isn't imperative to have a space to grow flowers to press them, if you do have the ability to grow your own flowers, I'd really encourage you to give it a go. Planting and nurturing even one little pot of violas or daisies will provide you with your very own homegrown flowers to press. If you don't have a space suitable for growing, don't worry; there are other ways to source flowers for pressing. I'll cover this in a later chapter. I adore gardening and have found it to be incredibly healing. However, whilst some of us love it, many others can feel intimidated, overwhelmed, or simply indifferent. There's so much conflicting advice about how we should garden and, unfortunately, we often start comparing our garden with others—becoming obsessed with achieving 'perfection' and simultaneously starting to resent tending to the space, perceiving it as one more chore to add to the list.

In reality, there's no such thing as a perfect garden, and every single garden on our beautiful planet is different, with its own opportunities and challenges: varying sizes, shapes, soil types, sunshine levels, and weather patterns. Whilst my garden features heavily throughout this book—it is where I grow and source my flowers for pressing—I have resisted providing any steadfast gardening rules for you to follow. I believe the experience of gardening is unique to each of us and I fully encourage you to embrace and enjoy your own remarkable journey. I've had no formal training in gardening. I was taught some basic approaches (water plants that have wilted—that's a great one) by my lovely Mum, Granny, and Grandpa, and the rest I've learnt by getting stuck in and giving it a go—a classic case of learning through trial and error. I've made mistakes along the way, but that's okay; it's all part of the process. When I gave myself permission to remove the pressure of creating a 'perfect' garden, the anxieties I felt towards gardening simply melted away and I was able to completely immerse myself in the fun and excitement of making a garden that is a true reflection of my personality and ethos for life.

A pot of viola flowers, grown from seed.

GARDEN MUSINGS

Whilst I fully encourage you to embrace gardening in a way that is authentic to you, below are a few of my reflections and learnings from my time spent gardening, some of which I hope may inspire you along the way.

I feel very lucky to have beautiful English bluebells growing underneath the oak tree at the far end of the garden.

Do One Thing Every Day

It can feel difficult to find the time to garden, and let's be honest: It's not hugely motivating to get outside when the weather is cold, wet, and miserable, or so hot that you feel the need to stop for a break every few minutes! As someone who lives with a chronic illness and who struggles with fatigue, it can often feel really challenging to find any energy to garden.

Dreamy daffodils; a wonderful sight each spring

To help keep things manageable, I've adopted an extremely simple but effective approach—do one gardening job every day. It can be a single, small, one-minute job such as removing a deadhead from a flower. It really doesn't matter; the key thing is to do *something*. On days when I feel good and I have the time, the energy, and the inclination, I find that starting with one job often motivates me to complete multiple jobs or tackle a bigger task (turning the compost heap, for example). However, even on difficult days,

doing one little task means I've still made progress and achieved something, which makes me feel good.

As a bonus, getting outside and enjoying a change of scenery (even if I do have to put on a raincoat or my thermals before I step out of the door!) is always invigorating and makes me feel even better. This small daily act is a perfect example of a positive self-care ritual. With the 'one job a day' approach, it's amazing how quickly you start to see progress. It gives me an enormous sense of achievement to know that even on days when I'm not feeling great, I still did something productive.

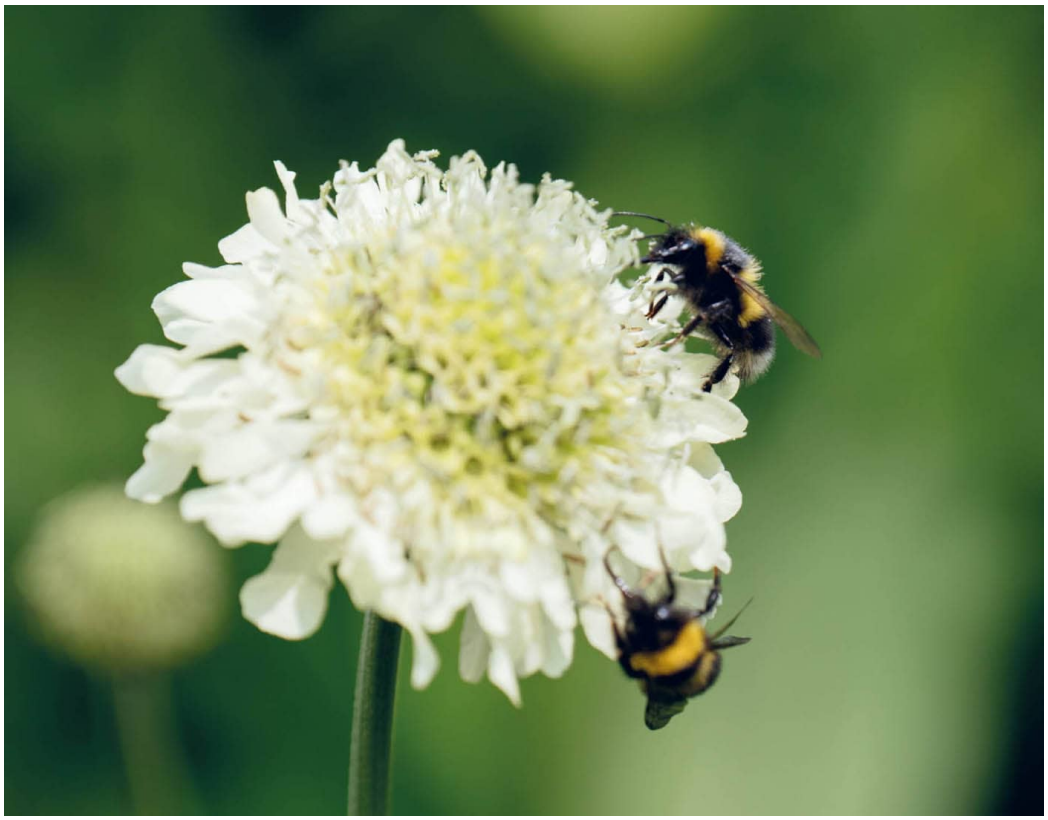
Let Nature In

Whenever I'm thinking about what to do in the garden, I always consider nature and wildlife in my decision making. I want my garden to be as abundant as possible—brimming with flowers, but also full of life, like lichens, mosses, fungi, insects, birds, and animals. My aim is to have as diverse a garden as possible and to create a haven for all of the lifeforms that choose to share the space with me. Therefore, my approach to gardening is always nature-first, and I'm the proud owner of a 'wild garden'. The pleasing thing about this philosophy is it gives me a great reason to be messy, imperfect, and unhurried in my gardening. I've rebranded *weeds* as *wildflowers*, and wholeheartedly welcome them to the garden (there's no such thing as a weed, in my opinion!).

Fragrant night-scented stocks, perfect for providing nectar for night-flying moths.

I let the garden guide me through the seasons, with the knowledge that every part of the seasonal cycle is important: I don’t clear leaf-fall in autumn; it is left to naturally decompose into the ground, nurturing the soil as it does so, whilst also providing vital hiding places and shelter for overwintering insects. I leave fallen apples and stunning structural seedheads to feed the birds through winter. In spring, I let seedlings from last years’ plants pop up in the flower beds, allowing them to instinctively choose where they wish to grow. In summer, I gently cultivate—removing spent flower heads, tying in climbing stems as they grow, but only doing the minimum required to allow the garden to flourish.

This stunning shrub rose is called ‘Gabriel Oak’ by David Austin—it grows very happily in the clay soil in my garden. The blooms are very pretty, and its scent is divine!



A stunning giant scabious flower—loved by bees!

This beautiful small white butterfly overwintered as a chrysalis in my greenhouse. Once spring arrived, I checked on it every day, knowing that once it hatched, I'd need to help it to find its way outside. After gently encouraging it into my hands, it quite happily sat there for a few minutes to let me admire it before fluttering away to feed on a nearby forget-me-not flower! A truly special moment.

All insects are welcome in the Meadow and Thyme garden—they each play a vital role in the garden's ecosystem. Here in the United Kingdom, some insects are often viewed negatively, particularly wasps. They are, in fact, excellent at pollinating and eating garden 'pests', such as aphids, so they really should be encouraged. Where there is an abundance of flowers and habitat to keep them busy, wasps aren't a nuisance—they only ever become troublesome in environments where humans have stripped the area of their essential resources and so they have no choice but to land on our plates of food to survive. Once we start to see the beauty and awe in every living

thing, and understand how our behaviour affects everything around us (positively or negatively), we begin to see things differently.

Every year I'm finding new species in my garden—different beetles, moths, birds, plants—and each new treasure I discover is an absolute joy. Once a wild garden has become well established, everything exists in equilibrium. Leaves get nibbled by the resident snails, but they are then eaten by the beautiful song thrush who greets me every morning with his beautiful uplifting melodies. There are greenflies on some of my plants, but the populations are managed by gorgeous little jewelled ladybirds merrily running up and down the stems and feasting on them. Caterpillars munch their way through my nasturtium leaves, and in return, a few months later, my garden is full of stunning butterflies fluttering through the flowers. There are always plenty of flowers in the garden, both for wildlife and for me to pick and press, but it's also so much more than that: It is a sanctuary for myself and for all of the plants and creatures that call it home.

Work with What You've Got

I've found it really helpful to let the garden guide me: I let it grow and evolve however it wants to, rather than trying to force the look and feel. All gardens have a unique set of characteristics, and it's much easier to embrace these and work with them. For example, plants that love to grow in full sun aren't going to do well in a shady space; plants that need vast amounts of water won't grow well in a dry climate; and plants that need good draining soil won't prosper if you have clay soil in your garden. Part of this approach may require some guess work—if you're not sure whether a plant will suit the growing conditions in your garden, you might decide to take the risk and see how it does. It'll either thrive, or it won't—and that's okay, it's all part of learning. If there is a plant in your garden that has been there for a few years and is looking great, it's likely that it's really happy there and therefore it makes sense to grow more of the same, or similar, varieties.

The Meadow and Thyme garden has a heavy clay soil, which can be challenging, but some plants thrive in it. I can still hear my Grandpa's delight when I told him about moving house and the new garden having clay soil, because he knew it would be great for roses—and he was right (of

course!), roses love growing here, and so I grow lots of roses. In the hotter summer months, the clay dries out and becomes solid. Many plants don't like it, so I simply don't grow them. The plants that *are* well suited to my garden are those that *want* to grow. They come back every year, or they self-seed everywhere (free plants are always a bonus!); they grow into large clumps that can be dug up, split, and replanted, so that each becomes a new plant (more free plants, yay!). They are telling me they are happy here and I should grow more of them. There's no point in fighting against your garden; let it guide you and tell you what to grow, and it'll make gardening much more rewarding and pleasurable.

Embrace Imperfections

A garden can be whatever you want it to be. For example, mine has wildflowers more traditionally described as 'weeds' growing in amongst the flowerbeds. There are messy areas, wild areas, decaying leaves, plants that have been stripped of their leaves by caterpillars, holes in the lawn made by a gorgeous little family of voles, patches that have been flattened by young fox cubs play-fighting in amongst the flowers—and *I love it*. There is so much to discover; an abundance of life; so many stories to tell; and everyone who visits the garden leaves feeling full of inspiration. Your garden is personal to you, so ignore the 'rule book' and garden in whatever way makes you happy.

Enjoy!

Gardening can sometimes feel like a never-ending 'to do' list and it's easy to forget to stop, take it all in, and enjoy the space. Taking time to simply 'be' and using all of your senses to embrace your surroundings has brilliant health benefits, and it ensures you give yourself time to reflect on, and feel pride in, your garden. My absolute favourite moments in the garden are when I simply sit in stillness, observe, and let the magic of my surroundings engulf me—it's when I feel most connected to nature, and it always results in a cleansing release of emotion and feelings of deep gratitude.

There's so much beauty and peace to be found in gardens, even in the depths of winter.

CHAPTER 03

Introduction to Traditional Flower Pressing

FLOWER PRESSING THROUGH TIME

Flower pressing has captivated human beings for thousands of years. There is evidence that ancient Egyptians used to press flowers and place them in tombs to be carried into the afterlife. In Japan, the fascinating practice of oshibana *dates back to the sixteenth century, which involves mindfully creating pictures using pressed flowers and foliage.*

A lovely pressed forget-me-not stem inside a vintage book.

A basket of stunning hellebore flowers gathered ready for pressing.

Botanists have used herbaria for hundreds of years to preserve and document botanical information. Plant specimens are collected, pressed, mounted onto paper, and stored in herbarium archives to provide a record of botanical species, helping scientists to understand plant distributions, changes over time, and to keep a historical plant record.

In Britain, flower pressing was very popular during the Victorian era, with special and meaningful flowers often pressed as keepsakes; for example, it was popular to press flowers that had been gifted by a love interest. The beautifully named ‘floriography’, which is the art of communicating through the meanings of flowers, also became increasingly popular, with pressed flowers exchanged as a way to discreetly send secret (often raunchy!) messages.

In the present day, flower pressing brings joy and calm. In a hurried and busy world that is increasingly being taken over by technology, flower pressing gives us a way to turn our backs on the noise and instead experience the same simple processes that our ancestors enjoyed. There is

so much delight to be found in slowing down and using our hands to create something natural, tangible, and full of wonder.

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN TECHNIQUES

Flowers pressed in the traditional way are placed in a flower press or underneath something heavy. In combination with absorbent paper that helps to draw out moisture, the weight applied to them means they flatten and dry out over time and are preserved. It's a slow process, usually taking at least three weeks, so it encourages patience. The excitement always builds when it's nearly time to open a flower press and discover the treasure inside. It is a calm, romantic, quiet process.

There are some modern methods of flower pressing now available—these include using a microwave to speed up the drying process, ironing flowers (gulp!), or using silica to draw moisture from the flowers. For me, the joy and magic are removed with these modern approaches. Whilst they may speed up the process, it is to the detriment of why I fell in love with flower pressing. I adore the nostalgia of pressing flowers the way my Granny taught me—the slow way—the way our ancestors also pressed flowers hundreds of years ago. The traditional approach connects us to nature, teaches us that not everything is instantly available (and nor should it be), and encourages us to slow down and appreciate the passing of time.

I'd absolutely encourage you to explore modern approaches if they appeal to you; however, for the purposes of this book, which aims to help you to reconnect to the *old ways* and to the joys of simple acts and seasonal living, I'll be guiding you through the wonderful mindful techniques of traditional flower pressing.

Choosing a Flower Press

I'm regularly contacted by people who have tried to press flowers but aren't achieving the results they had hoped for—common issues include the flowers turning brown, wrinkled, or mouldy. Whilst there are many factors that can influence how well your flowers press (these will be covered in detail later in the book), these issues are often the result of using a flower press that simply isn't up to standard.

There are a huge number of flower presses available to buy—from tiny presses that fit a single flower per layer, through to large presses—

sometimes A3 (11.7 x 16.5 in) or bigger. As a general rule, if a flower press is cheap to buy, it’s unlikely to give you good results. Cheaper presses will be made from substandard materials—flimsy wood that won’t press your flowers evenly, poor-quality paper layers that won’t draw the moisture out, and the wrong type of card between layers that can leave unwanted marks on your delicate flowers. Good-quality flower presses are expensive, but will last a lifetime, if not more—what a wonderful family heirloom to pass down through generations. Quality presses will be made with strong and sturdy wood that won’t bow (often plywood), will have six bolts rather than four to help with even pressing, and will come equipped with excellent blotting paper and rigid card, all of which are essential components when it comes to successful flower pressing.

A stack of traditional flower presses waiting to be opened to reveal the magic inside.

Pressed cherry blossoms.

After many years of flower pressing and trialling numerous presses, I have designed a flower press and now use this same press for all of my work. As a professional flower preservationist, I have an ever-growing number of presses in my studio and they are all in constant use in the flower-filled summer months—I'm confident in stating that the optimum number of flower presses to own is always *one more than you already have!* My flower presses are robust and truly fit for purpose, and I'm always confident of a good result when using them. They fit A4 (8.3 x 11.7 in) paper as I've found this to be the best size to work with: Smaller presses are too inhibiting when it comes to pressing large flowers or long stems, and

larger presses risk the wood bowing in the middle, which can result in an uneven pressing.

If you (or someone you know) are skilled at making, you can have a go at creating your own flower press; there are lots of how-to guides online. Aside from my tiny childhood flower press, the presses I first started with were made by my partner—they didn't look particularly pretty, but they did the job well! Having worked with many presses over the years, using my beautifully refined and tactile Meadow and Thyme flower presses really does enhance the flower-pressing experience and make each moment feel extra special. There's something really lovely about the weight of them, the way they feel, and the character and patina they develop over many years of use, and this all helps to make my flower-pressing experience even more immersive and mindful.

One of my ever-growing collections of wonderful traditional flower presses!

Buying a good-quality flower press, or the equipment needed to make your own, is an investment, so before making any purchases, I'd recommend giving flower pressing a go using my heavy book technique. You are unlikely to get absolutely perfect pressings using a heavy book, but they can still be utterly charming, and it's a good way to trial flower pressing to see how much you enjoy it before you fully commit to buying a

flower press. This is also a perfect way to start flower pressing with children, as it's an accessible and affordable way to press flowers.

Heavy Book Technique

When exploring beautiful second-hand bookshops and flicking through a book that has caught my eye (usually very old, with worn edges and a handwritten message in the front), I'm always delighted by how often I discover a pressed flower safely tucked up in the pages—a perfectly preserved moment in time from many years ago. I don't know whether this is an experience everyone has, or whether I'm somehow drawn to books with hidden treasures within their pages, but either way it's always a magical moment.

My heavy book technique is a slightly more refined version of the 'pop it in a book and hope' approach—it's more of a hybrid style, as I use a heavy book in place of the flower press to apply the pressure to flatten the flower, but I also use blotting paper and card in the same way as I would in a flower press to give the flowers a better chance of pressing well. This approach means there's no risk of ruining the inside of a book—I've found books with mouldy and wrinkled pages from a sad little forgotten flower, or with colourful stains from a flower that used to sit inside the book (which is admittedly quite charming, but not ideal for reading!).

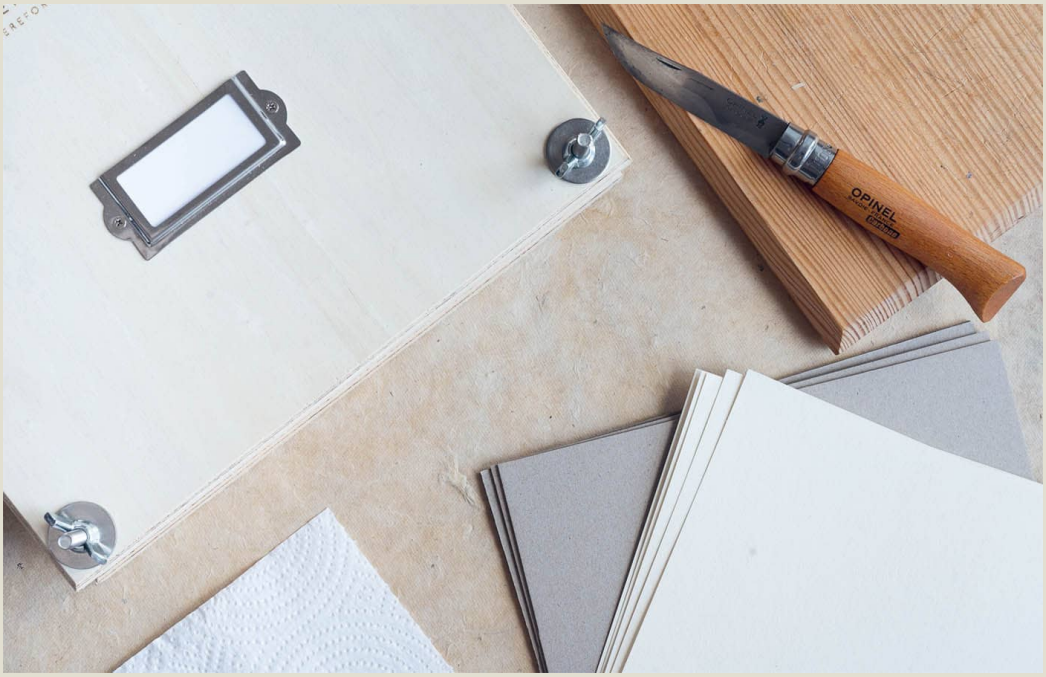
To give this approach a go, simply follow the instructions in chapter 5, using layers of blotting paper and greyboard to place your flowers onto, but replace the flower press with a heavy book (or several heavy books—the heavier the better!). Place the book on top of your layers of blotting paper and greyboard, and the weight will apply pressure to the flowers. This technique still incorporates the very important elements of using blotting paper to draw out the moisture, and rigid card to encourage even pressing, but removes the requirement for a flower press.

Once you've tried this technique, I'm hoping you'll fall in love with the process of traditional flower pressing and will feel confident in investing in a beautiful flower press that will be enjoyed for years to come.

Pressing flowers underneath a heavy book is a great way to start your flower-pressing journey. Here, I'm placing a heavy book over layers of flowers placed between blotting paper and greyboard.

Equipment

To get started on your traditional flower-pressing journey, you'll need the following equipment.



QUALITY FLOWER PRESS
A quality flower press is an essential piece of kit to help you to achieve the best possible pressings. The better the flower press, the better your pressings!>

ABSORBENT PAPER TOWEL
If there's any excess moisture on your flowers, paper towels can be used to dry them before placing them in the press—it's important to remove as much moisture as possible before pressing your flowers to reduce the risk of mould.>

KNIFE
A sharp craft or gardening knife is really useful—it means you can make precise cuts to your flowers when preparing them for pressing. This is particularly helpful when working with more advanced flower types—for example, trimming the back of a thicker flower before placing it in the press, or carefully slicing a stem in half lengthways so that it is less bulky. Always take care when using a knife—work methodically and slowly, and if you are flower pressing with children, make sure an adult does the cutting. I use an Opinel no. 8 classic

folding knife—it's a lovely size and I like that the blade can be safely folded away when it's not being used.

CUTTING BLOCK

This is simply an off-cut of wood used for cutting onto with your knife to save your work surface—an old chopping board would work well.

GREYBOARD

Greyboard is used to allow you to build up layers within your flower press, so that you can press lots of flowers all at once. I use 1.5 mm (approximately $^{1}/_{16}$-inch) greyboard—it's brilliantly rigid, which really helps your flowers to remain flat during the pressing process, and it won't lose its shape. It can be reused many times. You can find greyboard for sale in art and craft shops.

BLOTTING PAPER

Your flowers will be placed in your flower press with a layer of blotting paper underneath and on top of them—this magical paper helps to remove the moisture from your flowers as they press. Using excellent blotting paper (the type traditionally used to blot away ink when writing with a fountain pen) is really important. It does a brilliant job of drawing moisture out of the flowers, giving them the best chance of drying out and not turning mouldy. Choose a blotting paper that is as smooth as possible so that it won't leave any unwanted patterns in your delicate pressings. I've found the optimum thickness of blotting paper for flower pressing to be 200 gsm (135 lb). You can find blotting paper for sale in art shops and it can be reused many times.

CHAPTER 04

Selecting Flowers

SOURCING FLOWERS

When pressing flowers, the fresher your blooms, the better your chance of achieving good colour retention when you open your flower press. There are some other factors that can impact the quality of your pressings too, which will be covered in the next section (here). The best way to ensure your flowers are perfectly fresh when you place them in your flower press, is by picking them straight from the plant and pressing them immediately. This is one of the reasons why I'm able to fill my flower presses and know with a good level of confidence that I'll have beautifully vibrant pressings once they are preserved: my flowers are picked fresh from the Meadow and Thyme garden and taken straight into my studio to be pressed.

If it isn't possible to grow your own, one alternative way to work with freshly picked flowers is to responsibly forage for them. If you do forage, make sure you follow the 'one in twenty' rule—which means for every twenty flowers of a particular species you see, only pick one, and leave the rest for nature. It's also important to ensure you don't pick any protected species growing in the wild. Make sure you don't trespass and always ask permission if picking flowers from private land.

Another great way to access lovely fresh blooms is to volunteer at a local community garden—there are many wonderful community spaces that all need help to keep them productive—and in return for your time, many are happy to share their produce and flowers with the volunteers.

You can, of course, also buy precut bunches of flowers to press. I can't overstate the fact that fresh is best—therefore if you do buy your flowers, I'd really recommend purchasing them from a local organic flower farmer or florist, who will likely take great care of their flowers and will be selling them when they are still at their best.

Picking Flowers

There’s something very special about walking around a garden filling a basket with flowers to press, knowing that you’ll see them again in three weeks’ time and be able to enjoy them for years to come. When gathering flowers, before I start picking, I have a slow walk around the garden and observe everything that’s growing. Not only does this calming act of noticing all of the wonderful plants that I share the garden with immediately lower my heart rate and nourish my soul, but it also means I can devise a simple plan of what to pick and press, and what to leave. If there’s an abundance of a particular flower—a blanket of cornflowers, multiple spires of larkspur—I’ll be drawn to these, as I’ll know that even when I cut some, there’ll still be plenty left for nature. I also look for plants that I know will produce more flowers when the existing ones are cut, such as scabious, cosmos, and sweet peas; in a matter of days they’ll have grown new blooms to replace the ones they have kindly gifted to me.

Gathering flowers from the garden in late summer.

Once I've decided on a flower I'd like to press, if it's a full-length stem I'll use secateurs or florist scissors to cut it; I cut it to a length a little longer than I think I'd like it to be when pressed, as I can always trim some off when preparing it for pressing. If I'd like to take just a flower head or leaf, I'll either use my secateurs, or simply pinch it off with my fingers if it's dainty. If you are gathering flowers with children, I'd recommend reserving the use of the secateurs or scissors for the grown-ups and giving children the task of picking flowers with small stems that can just be pinched to cut them, such as the fabulous daisies that often decorate our lawns. Once cut, I carefully place the flowers into my flower basket. It's okay to layer them up

in a basket, but if you have any flowers that are particularly delicate and may get squashed, pick them last so that they can rest on the top.

A basket full of winter flowers and foliage.

The optimum type of day for flower pressing is a comfortably warm day where it hasn't rained for a couple of days previously. I find that midmorning to late morning is the best time to pick from the garden—by this point, any morning dew will have evaporated from the plants, but the hottest part of the day, where cut flowers may quickly wilt, is yet to set in.

Not every day is a good day for picking and pressing flowers. Whilst rainy days are important for watering our gardens and restoring water

supplies, they are not good for flower pressing. If the flowers and foliage you pick have rainwater on them, there will be excess moisture in your flower press, meaning your blotting paper will have to work extra hard to draw the moisture out, increasing the risk of mouldy flowers. The easiest way to avoid this is to simply not pick and press flowers on rainy days. If you do need to pick your flowers on a rainy day (perhaps it's a special day and you'd like to capture the moment to preserve a memory), make sure you remove as much moisture as possible from the surface of the flower using absorbent paper towel. Gently press the paper towel against every part of the flower and soak up as much water as possible before you place it onto your blotting paper for pressing.

Extremely hot days are also a challenge for picking flowers; if you fill a basket full of pretty blooms, then by the time you have prepped them for pressing and placed them in your flower press they are likely to be wilting and already losing their form and vibrancy. I avoid picking from the garden on very hot days, or if I really need to, rather than filling a whole basket and taking it into my studio to press all of them in one go, I'll instead only pick a few flowers at a time—enough to cover just one layer in my press. I place them into position in the press, with their layer of blotting paper and greyboard placed on top and lightly firmed down, before heading back out into the garden to repeat the process for the next layer.

It's important not to pick more flowers and foliage than you need, as it's a real shame to have leftovers that may be wasted. If this does happen, flowers with long stems can be placed into a vase to enjoy, or flower heads can be floated in a pretty bowl of water. It's very easy to get carried away with picking, especially in summer when there is floral abundance, but I must encourage restraint—you can always go back and pick some more if there's space left in your flower press.

The very best flowers for pressing are those that are 'young'. Aside from a few exceptions (such as poppies that often only bloom for a very short time), this tends to be a flower that is on its second day of blooming. If you pick them too early, before they have fully unfurled, you are unlikely to get the very best shapes from them, and they may not have yet developed to their full vibrancy. A flower that is in its second day of full bloom is still

young, and in its very best condition. The better the condition of the flower, the better the colour retention and form of your pressing.

Older flowers—those that have been in bloom for longer—do still press well, but they may have lost some of their vibrancy. Older flowers also often have a more developed seedhead—for example, in the centre of a Japanese anemone, a young flower will only have a small seedhead, whereas an older flower will have a swelling round seedhead—which can be more difficult to press as they are thicker and fleshier than the surrounding petals. If you're unsure on how old a flower is, observing the stamen of the flower can help. If the pollen on the anthers looks vibrant and the filaments (the tubes that hold up the anthers) are rigid and all intact, it's likely to be a young flower. If the pollen is less visible and the filaments are starting to fall off, it's an older flower.

Interestingly, some flowers give us even more clues as to their age—for example the tiny centres of forget-me-nots change colour when they have been pollinated and there is no more nectar available. They turn from vivid yellow to muted white; it is their way of communicating with the insects that pollinate them! This is a useful trick for flower-pressers to know as those with a yellow centre, that have not yet been pollinated, tend to be the younger flowers and therefore the very best for pressing.

Gathering flowers from the garden on a dry spring day.

Lovely spring flowers; forget-me-nots, primulas, bluebells, and violas.

Buttercups
Daisies
Forget-me-nots
Lavender
Pansies
Violas

Pressed buttercups, daisies, forget-me-nots, lavender, and violas—perfect flowers for those starting their flower-pressing journey.

FLOWERS FOR BEGINNERS

For those starting out with flower pressing, there are some varieties and shapes of flowers that press reliably well. I'd recommend you work with these to begin with, to help you get used to how to prepare and place your flowers in your flower press and to allow you to get a feel for how a well-pressed flower should look.

The best flowers for beginners are those with very simple forms, such as violas, buttercups, and small daisies. Individual petals are also a great choice. Violas, for example, have an obvious front and back, and are quite flat in shape, meaning they press evenly. They also have a low water content, so there's very minimal risk of moulding during the pressing process. Violas come in a variety of fantastic colours, some with fabulous patterns on the petals, and are a pleasure to create with after they've been pressed.

Thicker flowers (I like to refer to thicker flowers as 'juicy'!), such as roses, dahlias, and peonies, are a lot more difficult to press due to their high moisture content, multiple layers of petals, and thick stems. I'll provide you with some tips and tricks for pressing more challenging flowers later in the book, but I'd urge you not to start your flower-pressing journey by attempting to press any of these. It's rather disheartening to open your very first full flower press only to find sad, mouldy flowers!

Gathering buttercups for pressing.

LOOKING DEEPER

When you are choosing flowers and foliage to press, I'd really encourage you to *look deeper*. Take your time and explore, searching for unique shapes: wiggly stems, colour variations, tendrils, a nibbled leaf. As an example, sweet peas are often grown as cut flowers and the aspiration is to have perfectly straight stems. This is great if the purpose is to pop them into a vase of water for display and to enjoy their divine scent. However, if you are choosing a sweet pea for pressing, a straight stem is somewhat boring!

These beautiful sweet peas are full of charm with their curved stems, delicate flowers, and incredible tiny pea pods.

Instead, selecting a stem that has a fabulous curve in it makes for a pressing with far more personality and interest. If you start looking deeper in an effort to discover quirky treasures, you'll soon find yourself climbing in amongst the flower beds to reach that perfectly imperfect stem, on your

tiptoes stretching to reach a leaf with a particularly beautiful pattern or lying on the ground scanning the lawn for an elusive four-leaf clover. It's so much fun—I almost always end up with bits of garden in my hair and dirt-covered elbows!

As you start to look deeper and to see more, to notice details, you'll find yourself wholly immersed in your surroundings and feeling truly in awe of nature. It's a profound, life-shaping experience. Seeing—*really seeing*—the life that we share our planet with, in all its shapes, forms, and intricacies (all the creatures, the plants, the fungi, the lichen, the mosses) is cathartic, liberating, and healing.

Further Inspiration

Flowers are, of course, absolutely wonderful to press, and at a guess I'd say they make up around 80 percent of my pressings in any given year. However, there's also so much more to discover.

Leaves are brilliant for pressing—they press really well, and there are many lovely ways to use pressed leaves in creative projects. They are particularly enchanting in autumn when they start to change colour, filling our world for a few precious weeks with deep ochres, vibrant yellows, striking oranges, and vivid reds. There are so many fabulous shapes to be found. Seedheads are also really interesting to work with. From charming fluffy clematis seedheads through to intricately detailed spherical scabious seeds and characterful young seedpods of sweet peas or lunaria (press them before they become too well developed and woody), they all bring extra details, character, and interest.

Likewise, grasses are great to press—from beautiful wild grasses that sway in a summer meadow to ornamental grasses such as *miscanthus*—they are amazing at adding movement and texture to a piece of artwork and they press beautifully. It's even possible to press small mushrooms, thinly sliced root vegetables (yes, really!), moss, and seaweed. It's always worth thinking outside the box a little, and if you're not sure whether something will press well, give it a go and find out!

The scabious seedhead and gorgeous curved yarrow leaf in this artwork bring so much interest to the piece.

SAFETY

It’s very important to take care when handling plants. Many species are toxic, so it’s vital to wash your hands after handling them (I always advise washing your hands after flower pressing, even if you think all the flowers you’ve handled are safe). Some plants can sting, cause an allergic reaction, burn the skin when touched, or poison us if ingested, so it’s imperative to correctly identify plant species and know they are okay to handle—*if you have any doubt as to whether a plant is safe, don’t touch it.*

Many plants within the same species look similar, but one variety may be safe whilst another may not. For example, within the Apiaceae family, plants share similar characteristics, but some are harmless and others are extremely poisonous. The Apiaceae family includes one of my absolute favourite flowers to press—wild carrot, which is also known as Queen Anne’s lace. It is called Queen Anne’s lace due to one single central flower being a deep red colour whilst the rest of the flowers are white. Folklore tells us that Queen Anne pricked her finger on a needle whilst sewing lace and this is why the beautiful flowers have this distinctive characteristic.

It’s so important to correctly identify wild carrot, as it does resemble other poisonous plants within the same family. People with sensitive skin may experience irritation or blistering when handling Queen Anne’s lace, so even plants that may be fine for some of us to work with might be harmful for others. It’s always worth researching plants before you pick and press them to make sure they are safe.

Stunning Queen Anne’s lace flowers. Can you spot the single tiny deep red petal in the centre?

CHAPTER 05

Traditional Flower-Pressing Guide

HOW TO PRESS FLOWERS

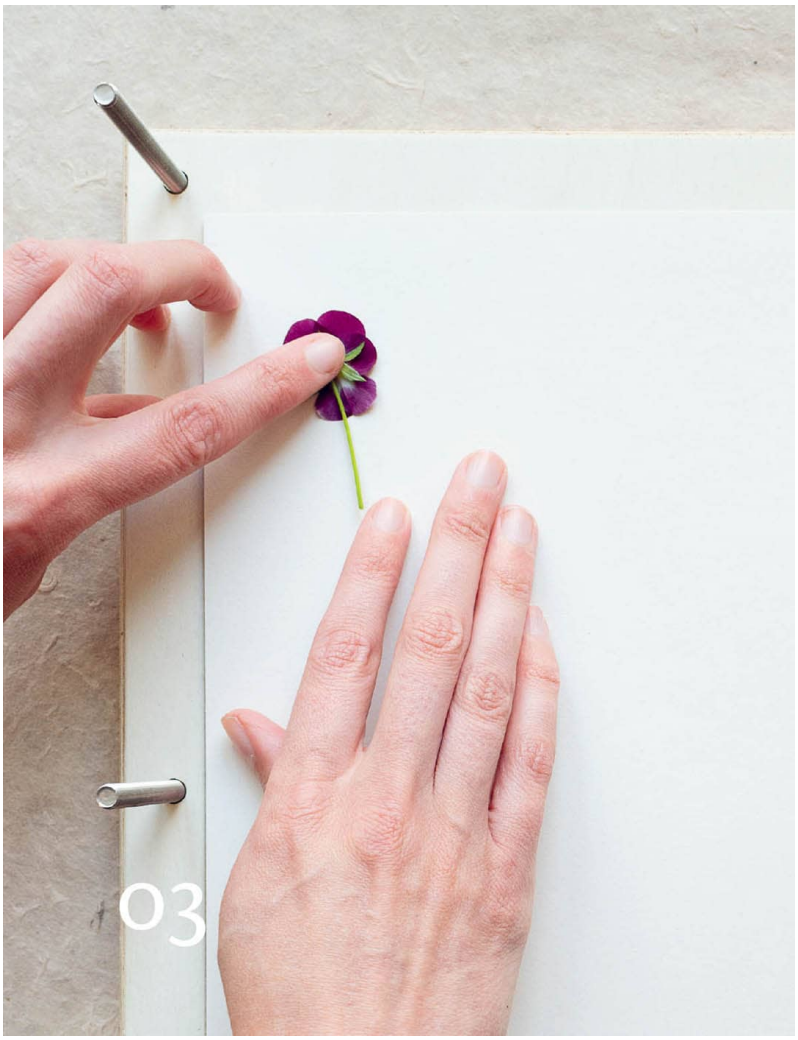
This section will guide you through my techniques for flower pressing using a traditional press. I find that most flowers and foliage are ready to use after three weeks, so once you've filled your flower press, you'll need to be patient. Awaiting the magical day when you get to open your press and reveal the treasures inside is a nice reminder that some things can't be rushed, but the reward is worth the wait!

Before you gather your flowers, I'd recommend having all of your equipment set out ready so that you can start pressing straight away. Whilst there is absolutely no need to rush your flower pressing—in fact I'd really encourage you take your time, work slowly, and enjoy the process—it does help the flowers to look their best if they are pressed soon after they are picked.

Stunning details captured in pressed larkspur flowers.

Place a sheet of greyboard, followed by a sheet of blotting paper, onto the bottom half of your flower press.

Choose the first flower you'd like to press. Prepare it, if needed, by trimming, removing parts, and so on. See the detailed steps for preparing different flowers and the section on advanced techniques later on in this chapter.



Place your flower onto your blotting paper, gently encouraging it to take the shape you'd like it to press in. Your flowers will be preserved in the shapes and forms you create when placing them in your press, so take your time to make sure they look their very best, such as checking that there aren't any folded-over petals.

TIP

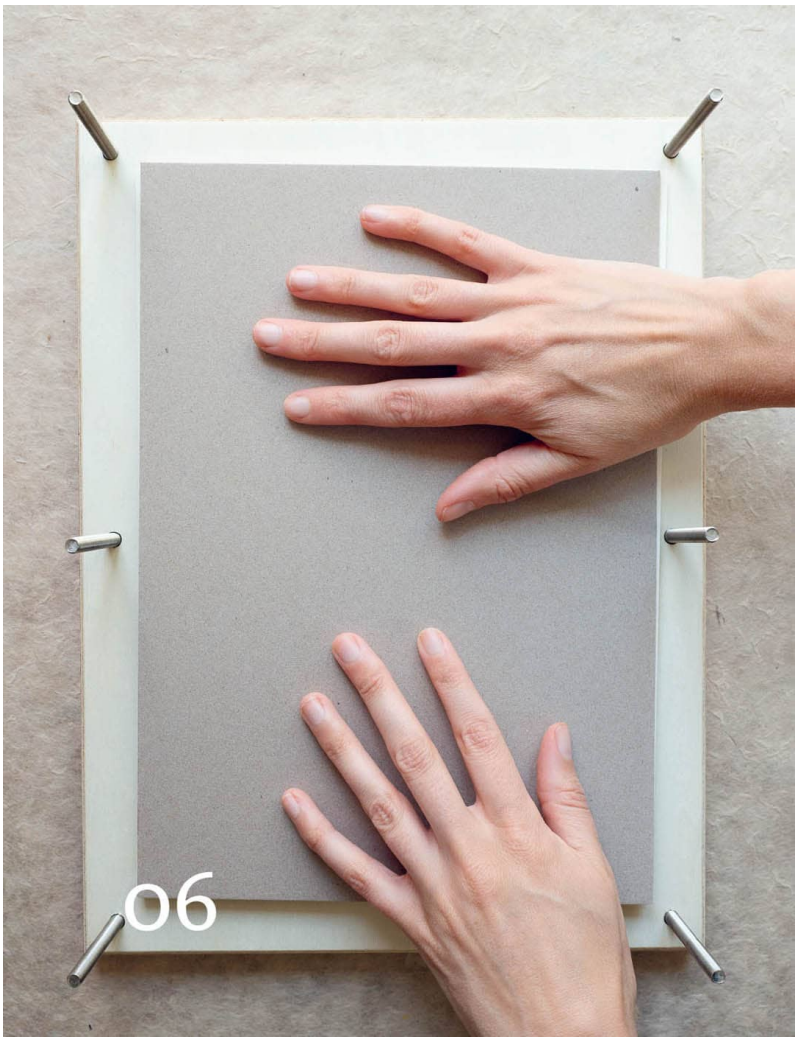
If your flower has an obvious front and back (such as a viola), place it face down. This gives you much more control over the shape of the flower.

Repeat steps 2 and 3 until your blotting paper sheet is full.

TIP

Make sure nothing is overlapping and that there is a gap of 1 centimetre (.4 in) in between each flower and around the edge of your sheet of blotting paper. Don't overfill each layer. Remember, the more you place in each layer, the harder your blotting paper has to work, and the greater the risk of mould.

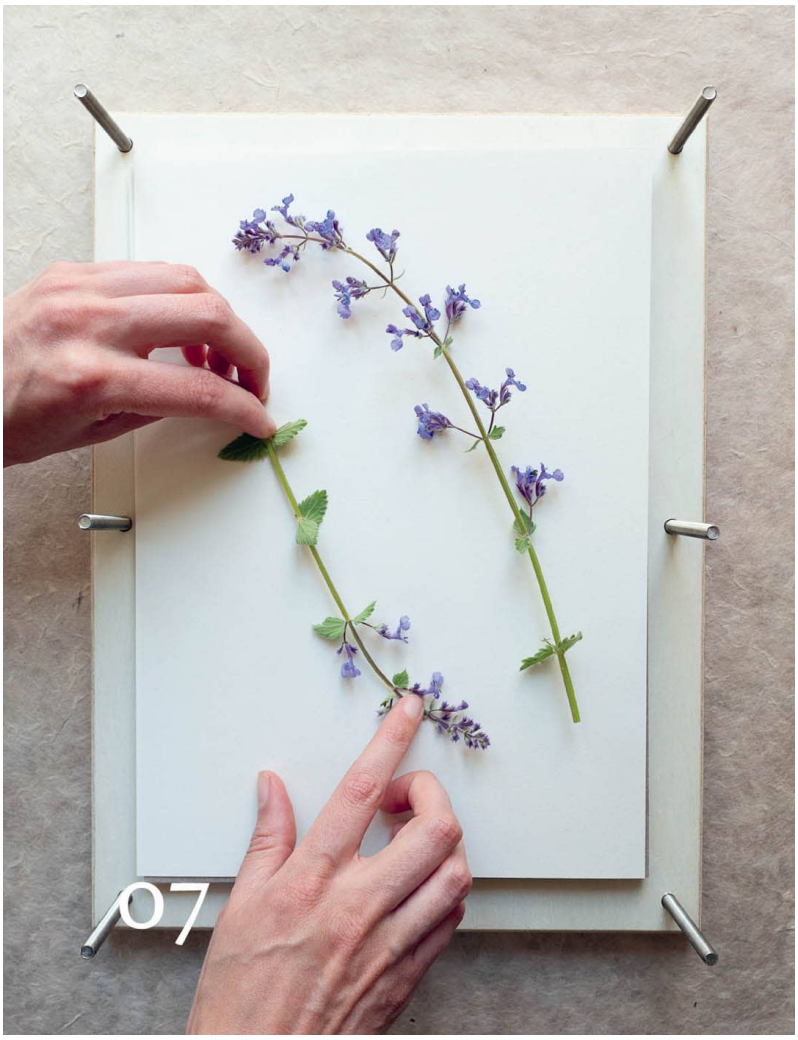
Check that all of the flowers are in a position you are happy with, then carefully place a layer of blotting paper over the top.



Place a layer of greyboard on top of the blotting paper and gently press down to partially flatten the flowers.

TIP

You don't need to add too much pressure; just enough so that you can easily build your next layer without it wobbling too much!



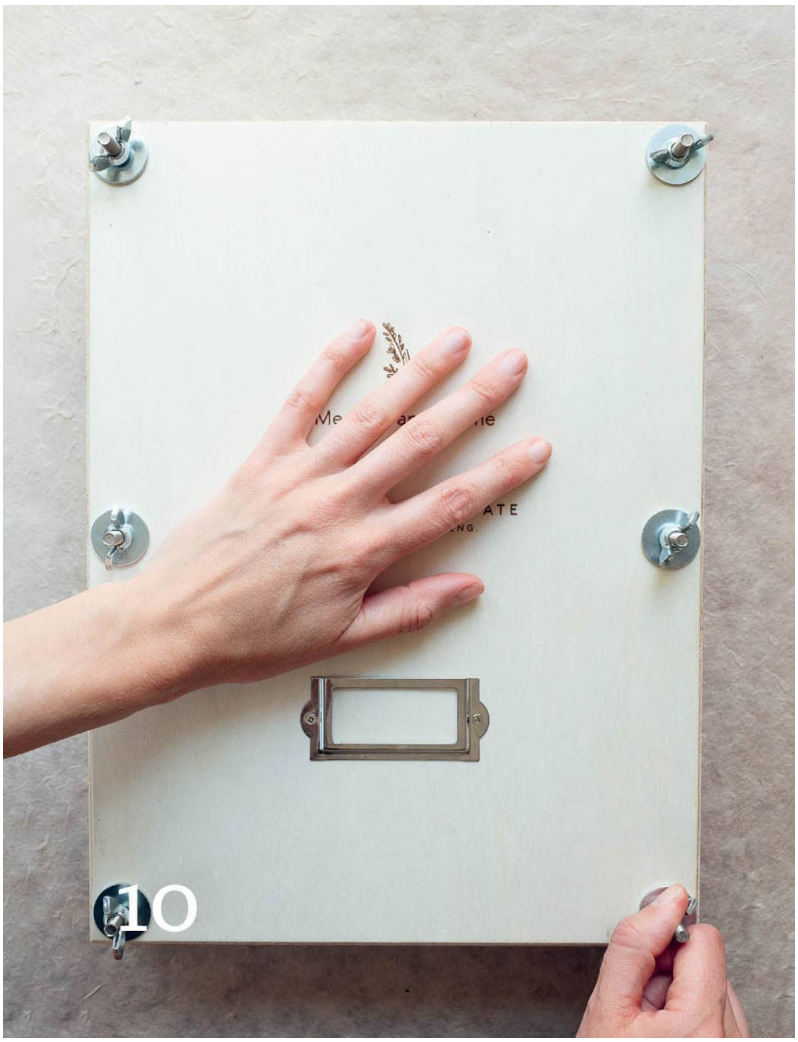
Add a sheet of blotting paper on top of your greyboard and repeat steps 2–6 until you have six layers of flowers and foliage.

TIP

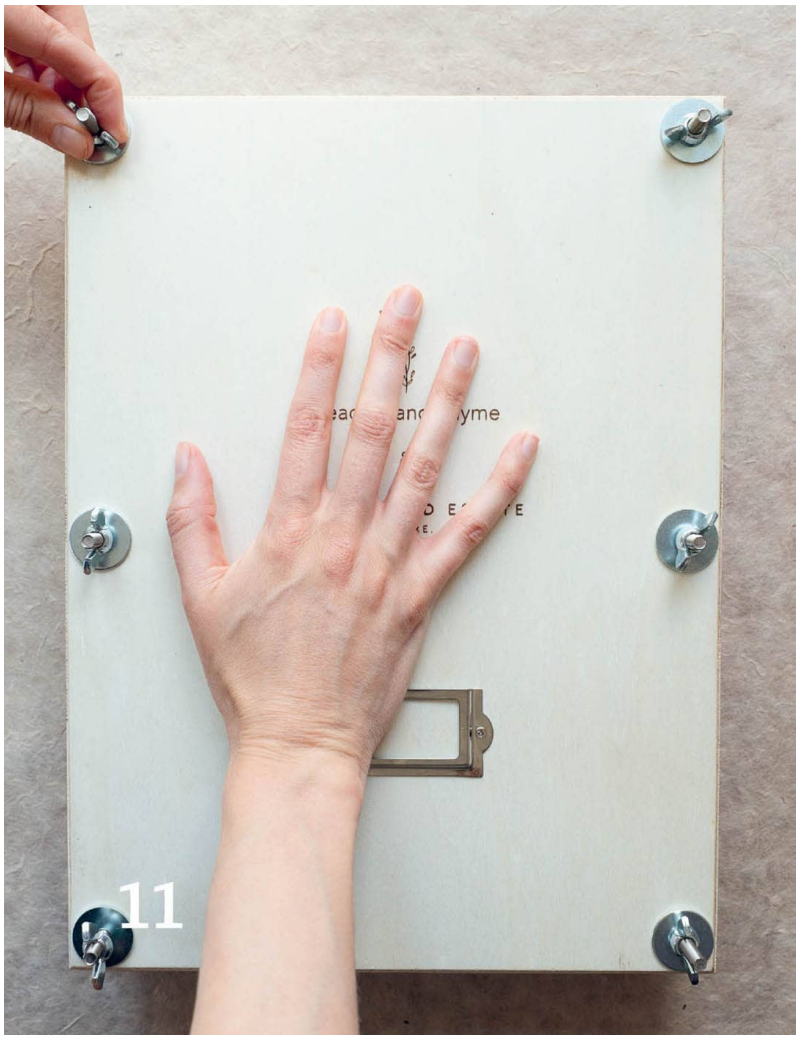
Try to stack your layers nice and neatly, with each lined up with the layer below, to help with even pressing.

Making sure there’s a sheet of greyboard on top of your final layer, position the top half of your flower press into place, so that the bolts are placed through the holes.

Place a washer over the end of each bolt and then lightly screw a wingnut onto each one. Don’t start tightening them yet; get them all into position but loose.



Place your hand over the centre of the flower press and push down to apply pressure. Starting with one corner, tighten the wingnut to a point where you start to feel resistance.

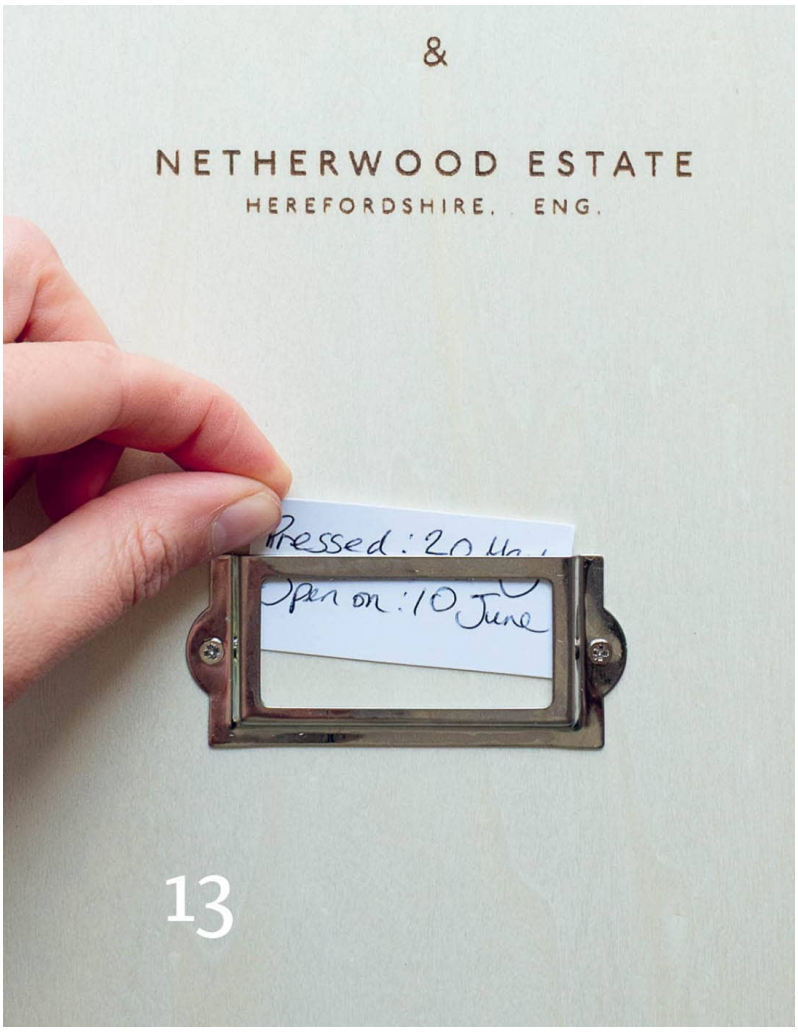


Repeat step 10, but on the diagonally opposite corner. Work your way around the flower press, tightening the remaining corner wingnuts to a point where you feel some resistance, followed by the two middle wingnuts, always applying pressure with your hand.

You'll probably find that now all the bolts have been tightened, some of them will begin to feel loose again as the flowers start to compress. Keep repeating the tightening process, turning the wingnuts until you feel resistance on all six bolts.

TIP

There's no need to over-tighten. After a couple of hours, the flowers and foliage will have started to flatten—you'll find you can then tighten the wingnuts again.



Make a note of the date that you filled your flower press.

TIP

I also like to write an 'open on' date (three weeks in the future) so that I know at a glance when the press will be ready to open.

Place your flower press somewhere warm and dry. In the first week, regularly check on the wingnuts and tighten them if they feel loose (I check mine once a day). After a week, you'll probably find they won't tighten any more—this is a good sign and means your flowers are nicely flattened and the pressing process is well underway. After three weeks, your press will be ready to open! See the detailed steps later in this chapter for how to remove your pressings.

Pressed flowers flowing through the seasons, from spring (top right) through to winter (bottom left).

PREPARING DIFFERENT FLOWERS

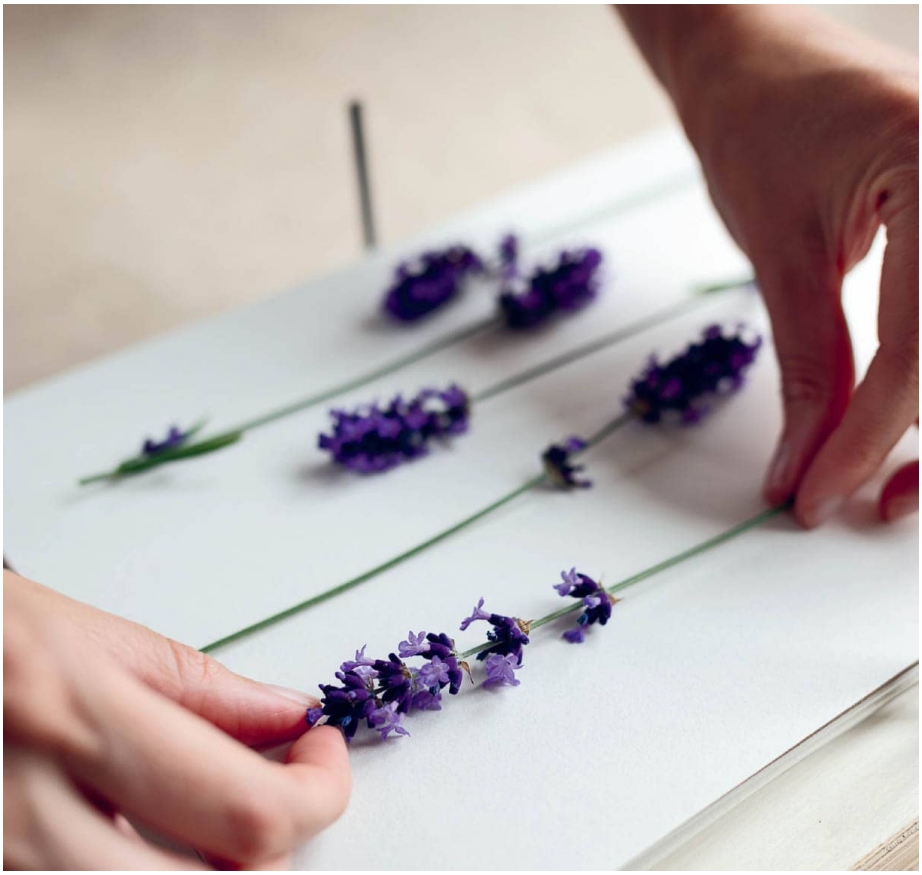
Some flowers have features that mean it's best to press them in particular ways. Here are some helpful tips for working with different types of flowers.

Flowers with an Obvious Front

Many flowers have an obvious front, or 'face', such as violas, Japanese anemones, geums, umbellifers, and daisies. Always place these into your flower press face down—it gives you much better control over how the petals are arranged as you can guide the flower a little as you place it to make sure all the petals are evenly spread and in a pleasing position. Leaves and petals also often have a defined front and back.

Flowers with No Obvious Front

Flowers that don’t have an obvious front and back (such as lavender, grasses, and achillea stems) can be placed any way up—where this is the case, it’s still a good idea to study the flower and decide the best way to position it. Consider any shapes and interesting parts, such as bends in the stems, and place them in a way that will best preserve these details.



Flowers with Longer Stems

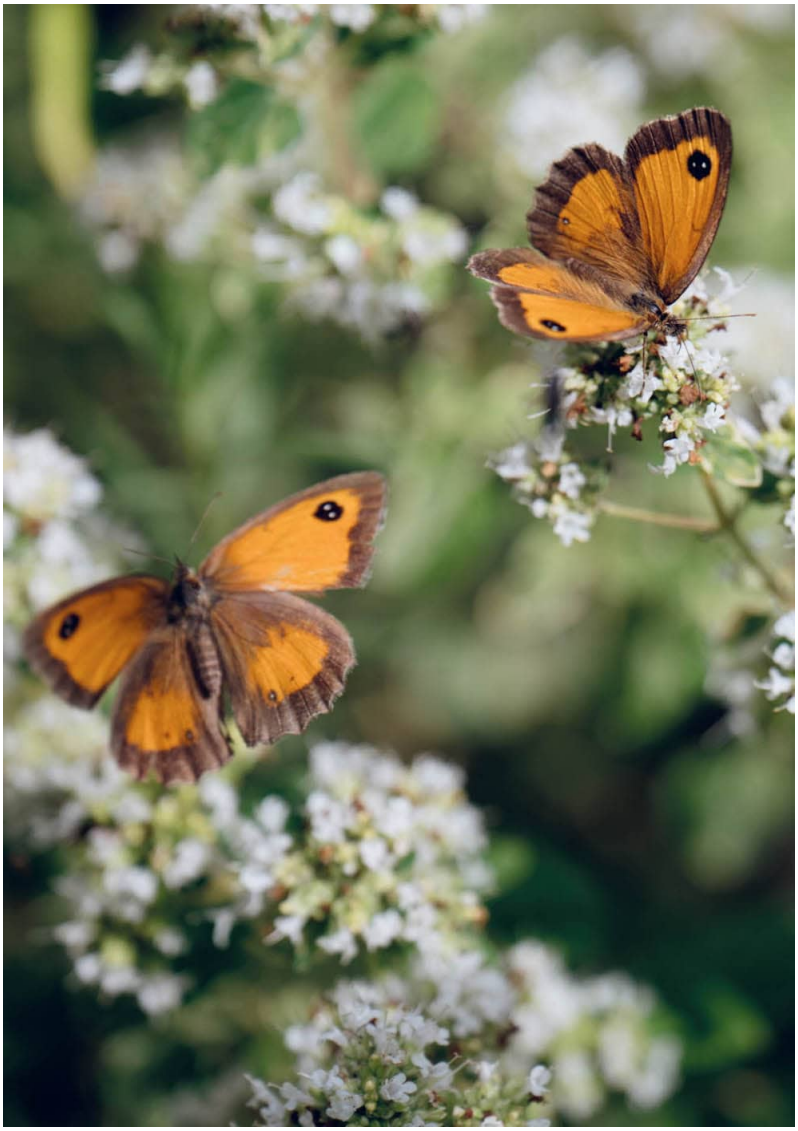
If you want to press a longer stem, perhaps with multiple stems growing off it, trying to press it whole is difficult—parts tend to overlap or not sit in a particularly pleasing composition. It’s much easier to use your knife to cut all the stems off and press them separately. Don’t forget that placing a stem diagonally across your flower press allows you to press a longer stem than placing it lengthways. Once pressed, you can then reconstruct all of the stems and glue them into place to replicate the original form—no one will ever know that it was taken apart to press!

Flower Heads with Individual Flowers

Flower heads that are made up of lots of individual flowers, such as achillea, can be quite dense, so it can help to thin them out before pressing. This reduces moisture in the press and ensures there's space for each little flower to look its best. If you don't remove some of the individual flowers, there's a risk that they will all compact into one another and lose their individual details.

REMOVING FLOWERS FROM THE FLOWER PRESS

When it's time to open your press, following the steps outlined here will help to keep your pressings in the best possible condition. Opening a flower press is always a magical moment; make sure you take the time to really study the beauty in each incredible pressing as they are revealed.



Stunning gatekeeper butterflies feasting on marjoram flowers.

Make sure you have waited for three weeks before opening your flower press! Unscrew all of the wingnuts and remove the washers.

Lift off the top half of your flower press.

Carefully lift off the top layer of greyboard and then the blotting paper.

TIP

If you reveal the first layer of pressings and they feel cold or damp, they aren't ready and need more time in the press. If this happens, put everything back in place and check again in a week.

Lift each flower off the blotting paper—it's a good idea to use craft tweezers for this.

TIP

Some pressings, especially delicate petals, do sometimes stick a little to the blotting paper—gently bend the paper and you'll find the edge of the pressing will start to lift off the paper. Using your tweezers, carefully encourage it until it lets go!

Continue to work through all of the layers of your flower press, carefully lifting each flower off the blotting paper.

TIP

Don't worry if not everything is perfect. Sometimes things get folded, just don't look great, or end up in an odd shape! This isn't a failure; it's simply part of the process. Anything that I decide isn't good enough to create with gets composted and in turn will feed my future garden flowers!

If you aren’t planning to create with your pressings straight away, place them in your storage container (there’s some information on this page about how to store pressed flowers).

TOP TIPS FOR PRESSING

Pressing astrantia and phacelia.

I like to stand at my workbench when I'm pressing flowers, as it gives me a nice overhead view of the flower press, but it's also fine to sit down if you prefer or aren't able to stand.

Don't be tempted to use household paper towels inside your flower press. Whilst it is absorbent, it's also deeply textured and often patterned, and if you place your flowers onto it to press them, they'll end up with the pattern indented on their petals! This is why blotting paper is the best material to use. Similarly with cardboard—I recommend greyboard because it is rigid—don't be tempted to use corrugated card. You'll end up with stripes in your pressings!

You can reuse your sheets of blotting paper and greyboard many times. They are fine to reuse even if they have some colour markings on them from previous pressings, or if they have indents in the shapes of past flowers. The indents will reform around the new flowers when you use it again. The only time I replace my blotting paper and greyboard is if they are looking very tired from use, or if I have a flower that goes mouldy in the press (it happens from time to time, even to experienced flower preservationists!). When they are no longer useable, I compost my old blotting paper sheets and recycle the greyboard.

If you are working with thicker flowers, or at cooler times of the year where moisture will take longer to be drawn out, a simple trick is to use multiple layers of blotting paper within each layer of your press to increase the absorbency. When I'm pressing in winter and early spring, or if I'm working with thicker flowers that have a high moisture content, I use up to four layers of blotting paper on either side of my pressings. This really helps to draw the moisture out of the flowers quickly.

A selection of pressings—isn't nature amazing!

Some flower preservationists recommend changing your blotting paper every day or every few days to reduce the mould risk. I don't change mine at all. There's no right or wrong method for this, and I'd encourage you to try both approaches and decide which works best for you. I've experimented with changing the papers and have found that when flower petals are in a mid-state between wet and dry, they are extremely delicate and very likely to tear or wrinkle if disturbed. Therefore, I prefer to leave them be and trust in my flower press and blotting paper. Remember that using multiple layers of blotting paper helps! Be under no illusions; I do sometimes get mouldy flowers, but for me, that risk is outweighed by the

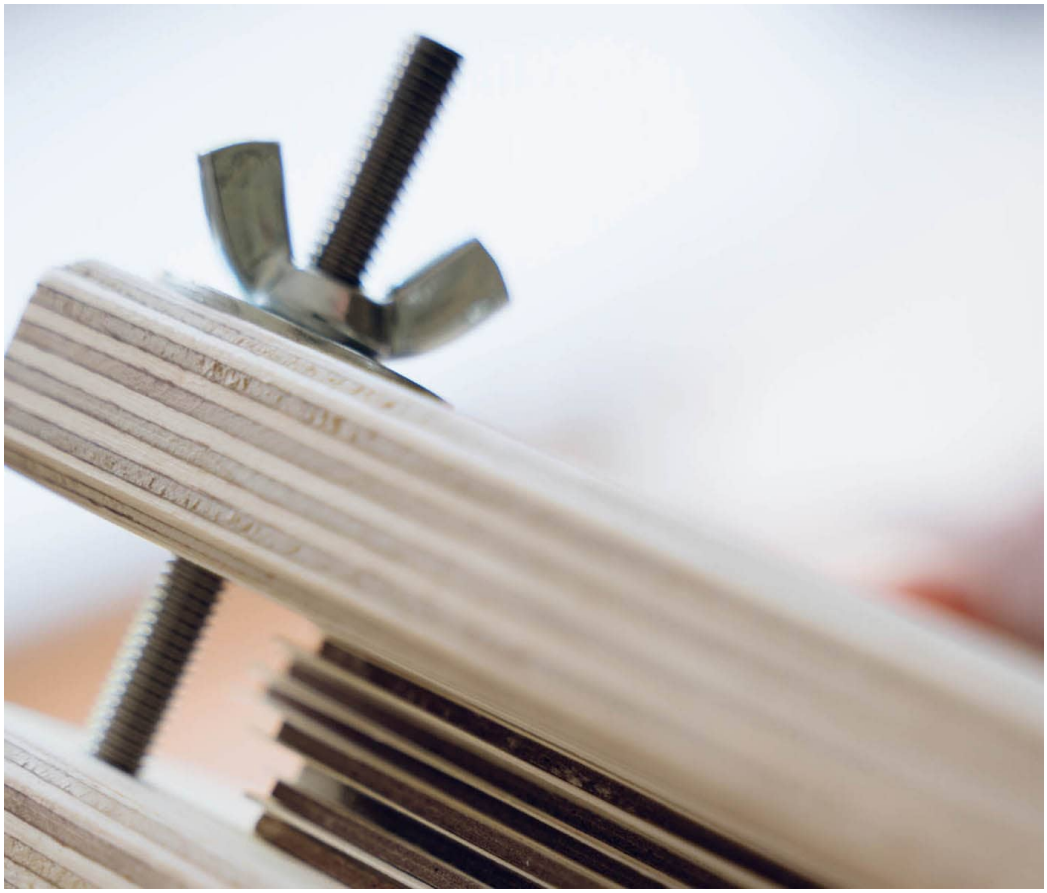
pristine way pressings look when they have been left undisturbed in their original pressing position.

Linked to the point above, as much as you'll feel tempted to have a little peek and see how your flowers are doing during the three-week pressing period, I implore you to exercise restraint and leave your press alone! You risk damaging the petals if you lift up a sheet of blotting paper and then put it back in place (I'm speaking from experience here—I've managed to fold petals over on themselves when attempting a cheeky peek). I have learnt that it's important to ignore the desire to take a look—I promise your restraint will be rewarded in the end!

When filling the press, I've found six layers of flowers to be the optimum number. It is no problem to have fewer layers, but any more than six and those in the middle layers start to risk not drying out well.

If you don't have enough flowers to fill your press during one session of pressing, it's fine to open your press and add some more layers in on another day. Just make sure you don't disturb the layers that are already in there, and ensure you make a note (perhaps write on the greyboard with a pencil) of the dates when the different layers were added, so that you don't remove anything too soon.

When building up your layers of pressings, the best approach is to place flowers and foliage of a similar thickness on the same layer. For example, fill one layer with all petals, another layer with all grasses, and another layer with all lavender. They don't have to be the same species, just similar in size. This means that during the pressing process, everything within that layer will compress and behave in a similar way, allowing your blotting paper to sit nice and evenly across the whole layer and ensuring good contact with the blotting paper for all the flowers, which really helps when striving for beautiful pressings.



Nicely compressed layers within a traditional flower press.

Pressing purple toadflax—it has such a lovely shape!

If working with different layers where some have thicker flowers and others have thinner flowers, it's also worth thinking about the order in which you place them into your press. I'd recommend placing layers of thick juicy flowers on the outer layers (the first layer you create, or the last), and those with thinner flowers (such as petals) in the centre layers. This helps with reducing how damp the middle layers will get, as the wettest layers are on the outside and less surrounded, therefore the moisture has a better chance of escaping.

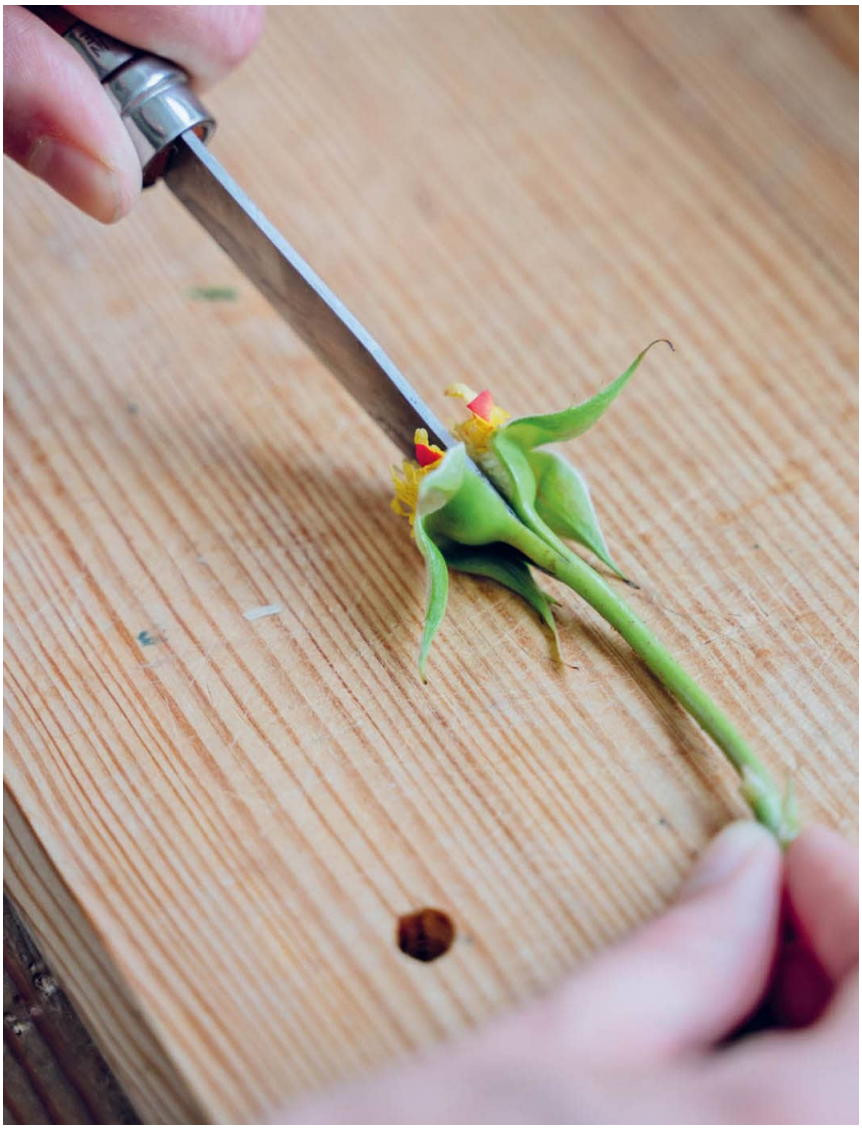
One final tip: When you are picking your flowers, and when you are placing them in the press, please check really carefully for insects. If you

find any, make sure they are hastily returned to their happy place in the wild!

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

Some flowers are very challenging to press. I've learnt to accept that on occasion it's just not meant to be. However, for many difficult flowers, there are some tricks you can try to increase your chances of success.

Pressing individual rose petals.



Slicing a rose stem in half before pressing to reduce the thickness.

Many flowers have a **thick centre** hidden underneath their layers of petals, such as lisianthus. Carefully pinching this out using your finger and thumb will help to reduce how bulky it is.

I've had success with pressing **rose buds** by slicing the whole bud in half lengthways and removing almost all of the bulk from the middle. Once pressed, looking at it from the uncut side you wouldn't know that it had been cut in half. There's also an extra bonus here, as you end up creating two rose buds out of one!

Some plants have very **thick and juicy stems;** again, roses are a good example of this. I've found it really helpful to reduce these down by

carefully cutting them in half vertically and pressing the half stems. **Larger daisy flowers** such as calendula and osteospermum can mould in the centre as they are very thick and hold a lot of moisture. However, it is possible to reduce the bulk by carefully slicing off some of the back. This is tricky to do; I have on occasion been over-ambitious and sliced too much off, and subsequently the whole flower has fallen apart! This is definitely one that requires some practice, but the more you do it, the easier it gets. If it does fall apart, you can still press the individual petals.

Many flowers that are **petal-dense and thick and juicy** don't press well. Large roses, dahlias, and peonies all fall into this category. However, they can still be pressed; it's just a more involved process. The flowers will need to be deconstructed, carefully removing and pressing each petal separately. Any other elements can also be pressed individually—flower centres, stamens, stems, leaves, and so on. Once they have all been pressed, they can be reconstructed, with each element carefully glued back into place. It can help to take a photograph of the whole flower before you press it, so that when you recreate it you can try to make its form look as natural as possible.

Sunflowers are a real challenge. Each petal will need to be removed and pressed individually. The centres are really thick and if you attempt to preserve them with just pressing alone, they often go mouldy. I've had success with the centres by combining pressing with air-drying—press the centres for three days, with multiple layers of blotting paper on either side of them. Then remove them from the press and lay them out somewhere warm and dry for three days. Air-drying helps to remove the moisture, but there is a risk, as whilst they are out of the press, they will start to curl. Put them back in your flower press for three days, and then yes, you've guessed it, remove and air-dry for three days again. Repeat this process until they are fully dry and pressed. I've found this process takes around six weeks. You can then reconstruct the shape as you glue it all into place.

A pressed sunflower—a lot of work but definitely worth it!

Working with Precut Flowers

Whilst working with freshly cut flowers is ideal, it's not always possible. I'm regularly commissioned to press wedding flowers and create lovely meaningful artwork with them. Whilst I always request the flowers are brought to my studio the day after the wedding in the hope they'll still be full of life, they will still be at least a couple of days old and will most likely have had a tough day being out of water whilst the wedding celebrations were underway.

This fabulous Icelandic poppy really stole the show in one of my favourite wedding commissions. The petals, stem, stamens, and seedhead were each pressed separately and then carefully reconstructed—what a beauty!

If you are pressing cut flowers that are a few days old, such as wedding flowers, farewell flowers, or an anniversary bouquet, the following tips will help you to get the best results out of them. Using secateurs, carefully snip a small length off the end of each stem and place the stems in water for a couple of hours before you press them. This will allow the flowers to draw up fresh water and revive any limp stems. When you do then start placing them in your press, trim the wet ends off beforehand, or thoroughly dry them with paper towel. If after a couple of hours there are any flowers where the petals have gone limp, started to brown, or are falling off, or the stems are drooping, these are sadly not going to be good enough to press, and no amount of water will rejuvenate them.

By the time a wedding bouquet has made it to my studio, there will inevitably be some flowers that aren't good enough to use. For this reason, I always ask for some 'back-up' flowers to press in addition to the main bouquet, such as a bridesmaid's bouquet, or flowers that were used to

decorate the venue. This means I always have plenty of flowers to work with and press (here’s an example of a situation where having lots of flower presses comes in handy!), and I can then select the very best pressings to feature in the artwork.

COLOUR CHANGES

As already discussed, there are some important steps for achieving beautifully vibrant pressings; namely, using good quality equipment and working with fresh, young flowers. Additionally, each different flower variety has its own unique characteristics, and some retain colour better than others.

The best way to understand this is through practice: Press as many different flowers as possible. Over time, through your own observations, you'll build up your knowledge of how different plants behave when pressed. Plus, it's always exciting opening a flower press with a 'first time' flower in it!

The primulas in this photograph are all from the same plant—the pink flowers are fresh and the deep indigo blue have been pressed.

Colour Change During Pressing

During the pressing process, the pigments in some flower varieties break down and change colour. Interestingly, this is more likely to happen with certain colours, whereas others quite reliably retain their original colour, or perhaps only subtly change colour. I've found pink flowers to be the most likely to change colour—many, but not all, turn blue when pressed. To me, this makes flower pressing all the more enchanting and thrilling—seeing something transform feels like pure alchemy!

The only situation I've found where colour change in pressed flowers can cause a bit of an issue is when pressing meaningful flowers (perhaps wedding flowers or a special flower from the garden) and they end up looking completely different after pressing. Therefore, if you are pressing flowers for someone else, it's always best to warn them that they may change colour when you press them. Whenever I chat with a wedding flower preservation client, I always make sure they are comfortable with this, especially if they tell me their colour palette includes pinks!

Colour Change over Time

One of the most common questions I get asked is, 'How do I stop my pressed flowers from fading and turning brown?' The honest answer is, you can't. There are some products that claim to protect or prolong the colour, but they are often full of chemicals and can affect the look of your pressings when applied. I've also seen some artists 'colour correct' their pressings by painting over the petals, which is something you could look into if you so wish.

Keeping your pressings out of direct sunlight will slow the colour fade, but it won't stop it completely. You can also use UV-protected glass over your artwork, but again, it will only slow, not stop the process.

I'm going to suggest something that is perhaps a little radical here, so hold on tight—I'd really encourage you to fully embrace, and fall in love with, the fade and browning! Flowers are natural, and everything in nature eventually fades. It is a beautiful, touching reminder of the ephemerality of life, of constant change, and that ageing is a marvel and a privilege to witness.

As a general rule (but remember there will be exceptions), different coloured flowers and foliage behave in the following ways:

White Most tend to turn cream or a light brown when pressed—I call this 'vintage cream'!

Yellow A very reliable colour to press; I find almost all yellow flowers retain their original colour well.

Orange Sometimes turns a little darker, but again, fairly reliable.

Red Some turn slightly darker; others stay true to colour.

Purple Flowers tend to darken to deep, rich purple tones.

Pink Anything goes! Okay, I'm being a touch dramatic here—some pinks do stay pink (for example, I've found pink roses, cosmos, sweet peas, Japanese anemones, and carnations tend to retain their pink tones). However, others will turn blue—some a mid-blue, some a deep indigo blue. It's completely fascinating, and oh so beautiful! My advice when working with pink flowers is to expect the unexpected!

Blue A joy to work with; they reliably retain their beautiful blue hues.

Green The colour retention in green flowers, leaves, and stems varies—most keep a good level of colour, some lighten, and some turn to yellow or brown tones.

This gorgeous pressed fern is slowly changing colour from green to earthy brown—it's such an intriguing process to observe.

My biggest worry when I started selling my pressed-flower pieces (and especially for wedding commissions), was that people might not like the fact that they will fade. I therefore decided that I would be completely honest about this aspect of my work, and all pieces are sold with a note telling customers that the flowers will fade and change over time. And do you know what? *They get it*.

The rate at which different varieties of flowers and plants fade varies; some stay vibrant for many years, whilst others start to change after only a few months. I find white flowers often start to turn brown fairly quickly,

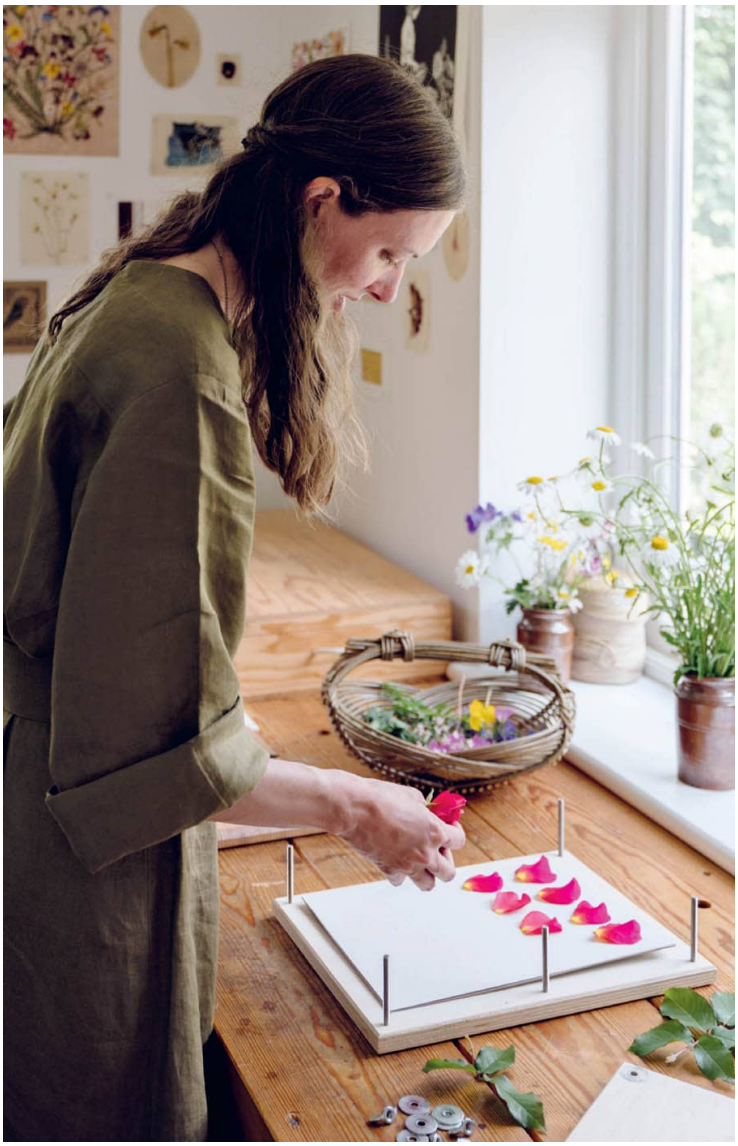
and greens are also quite quick to turn to more earthy tones. Blues are particularly good at keeping their colour for many years (I have some framed forget-me-not flowers in my home that are still a vibrant blue after seven years).

To me, pressed flowers only get more beautiful as they age. As they mellow in colour to more vintage tones, they become even more interesting, with extra character and new stories to tell. Is there anything more enticing than an ever-changing work of art?

With the knowledge that the flowers and foliage I'm working with will fade over time, I always endeavour to create pieces that will age well and retain curiosity and intrigue, even when the vibrancy has gone. It's helpful to always have the concept of colour change in mind when you create with your pressings, asking yourself, 'Will this still look good when the flowers have aged?' This is where using interesting shapes and forms can really make your creations shine—entangled stems, fantastic leaf shapes, and pretty floral profiles look incredible, even when they've succumbed to their natural ageing process.

If you're struggling to feel fully convinced by my 'embrace the fade' approach, there is one other option for your artwork—you can take a good quality scan or photograph of the original piece and get it printed. This way, you'll always have a colourful version of the artwork, as it looked when the flowers were fresh out of the press. It can be fun to have both the print and the original on display, to compare them as the original changes on its enchanting journey through time.

Experiment!



Enjoy the creative process and always stay curious!

Everyone’s flower-pressing journey is personal and unique to them. I hope that with my guidance and tips, you’ll feel confident to give it a go, safe in the knowledge that it’s absolutely okay to find imperfect pressings or the occasional mouldy flower, and that not everything will turn out how you expected.

This isn’t a failure; it’s a fundamental part of the process. I’ve found laughter is the best response when I open a flower press and find something

has gone wrong—ultimately, *it doesn't matter*. I have such a tendency to focus on negatives, and a talent for forgetting about all the wonderful successful pressings and artworks I've created. I'm learning to change my mindset and forgive myself when things don't go to plan. Being kind to ourselves is so important.

Building on this, I'd really encourage you to experiment with your flower pressing. Celebrate the successes and shrug off anything that doesn't work well. A big element of most creative endeavours is trial and error and learning by doing (and perhaps a little bit of luck!). The more you do it, the better you'll get, and the more confident you'll feel. If you see a flower, leaf, or any other flora and wonder whether it will press well—give it a go, with zero expectations, and see what happens! You might just end up with something completely wonderful.

STORING PRESSED FLOWERS

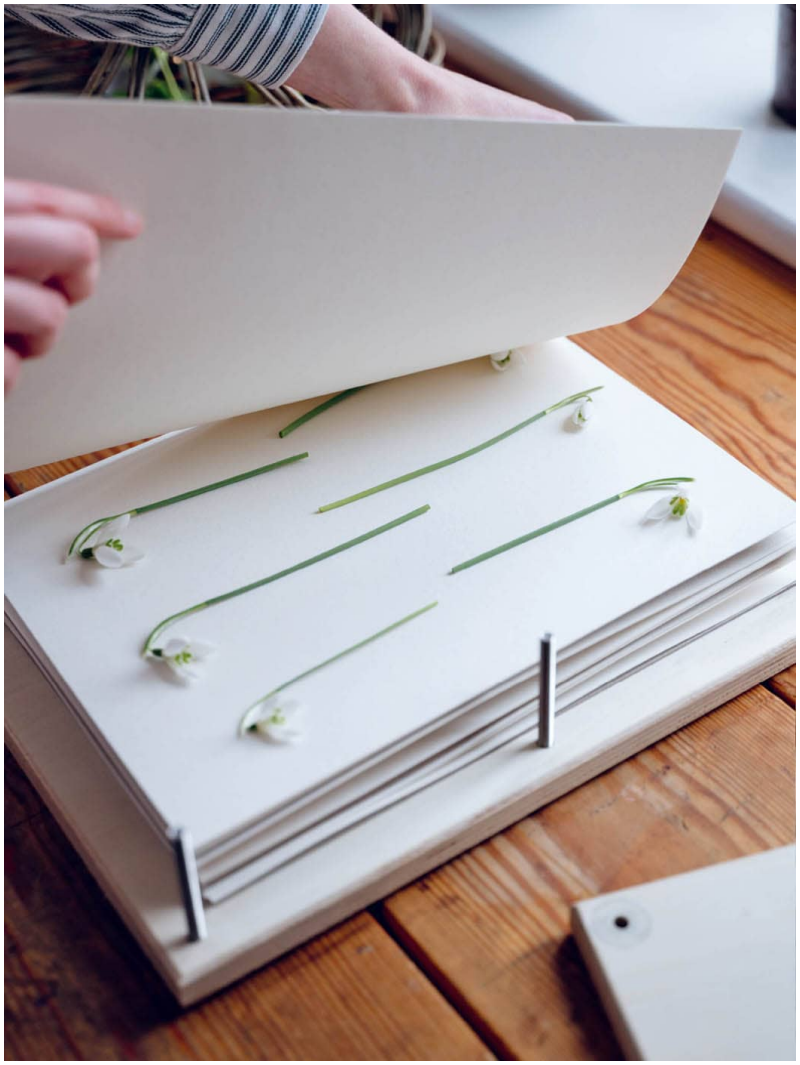
Once you've opened your flower press, you may want to start creating with your pressings straight away; however, it's also fine to store them for use in the future. If kept in the right conditions, pressed flowers and foliage can be stored for many years.

As my garden provides all of my pressings, I work cyclically and **refresh the collection** each year as and when each variety grows—for example, any forget-me-nots that I haven't used within the year are composted and replaced with new pressings when they bloom again in spring. Some pressings do become more brittle with age, so they need a **delicate touch** when working with them, especially when applying glue.

It's essential to keep your pressings somewhere **dry and dark.** I store mine in a large wooden box—it was originally a box for storing fancy wine bottles, purchased from a vintage shop and repurposed. It's great because it is large but shallow, perfect for laying out lots of pressings. My partner kindly created some little section dividers for smaller pieces, within which I like to group them by colour. The decision to keep similar colours together is purely because it looks pretty; you could also group them by variety, shape, size, petals, leaves, and so on, any method that works for you. The larger sections allow me to store bigger pressings and longer stems.

My large wooden storage box, full of pressings ready to be used for creative projects.

The section dividers within my storage box, keeping my smaller pressings neatly in place and nicely ordered.



Pressing delicate snowdrops.

Some pressings have a **tendency to curl** when stored; therefore, for any that are likely to do this, alongside pressings with very long stems, I place them within layers of blotting paper to keep them flat. These are then stored within the same wooden box: I simply place the little tower of blotting paper sheets on top of the box dividers.

It's really important to ensure there's **no moisture** in your storage box. I keep a little bowl full of sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) inside the box. Any natural desiccant will work (cat litter is very effective!) to help absorb any moisture—if it starts clumping together and hardening, that is a sign that it's soaked up some moisture and needs replacing. I also pop any little sachets of absorbent bentonite clay, which are often included in packaging

when purchasing household items, into the box; you can also use silica gel sachets, although I only use the clay as it is kinder to the environment and non-toxic.

The **climate** in the United Kingdom is amenable for flower pressing and storage; if you live somewhere where the weather is more humid, this will make it more challenging to store your flowers. The higher the humidity, the greater the chance that your flowers will absorb some of this moisture, which can lead to them curling or moulding. (This also applies to the pressing process—it's more difficult to remove the moisture successfully when the air has a higher water content.) If you live in a more humid climate, you may find you need to store your pressings in a completely sealed container, and with a lot of desiccants.

Layers of blotting paper are used to store larger pressings, such as those with long stems.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Mouldy flowers in the flower press

This is such a common issue, and there are multiple reasons why flowers can go mouldy during pressing. They may simply be the wrong flowers to press—too thick and too full of moisture. If you are pressing thicker flowers, try removing bulky parts of the flower, or deconstructing the flower and pressing it piece by piece. Mould can also be a reflection of trying to press flowers in humid or wet environments, or caused by using incorrect equipment—I cannot overstate how important it is to use a good-quality flower press and blotting paper.

Stored flowers that have gone mouldy

If flowers go mouldy when you store them, it may be that they weren't completely dried out when you took them out of your flower press. If you open your flower press and flowers feel cold or damp, they aren't ready. Fully pressed flowers will feel dry and similar in texture to thin paper. Make sure you store your flowers somewhere dry, away from humidity, and use desiccants in your storage box to help remove any moisture that may be present.

Colour retention during pressing

Different flower varieties retain colour to different levels, so it's good to experiment with different flowers. It's also normal for some flowers to completely change colour when they are pressed. Working with freshly picked young flowers gives you the best chance of achieving vibrant pressings. Again, it's also essential to use the right equipment—a quality flower press and blotting paper will really help.

Colour retention over time

Pressed flowers are natural and will fade over time. It's a beautiful part of working with natural materials, and I'd encourage you to fully embrace it.

Wrinkled petals or uneven pressings

This is likely to be caused by your flowers not being in full contact with the layers in your flower press during the pressing process. Press flowers of a similar thickness within the same layer of your flower press. Make sure you regularly tighten the wingnuts on your flower press so that there is good contact with the flowers.

Pressings curling when taken out of the flower press

Some varieties of flowers and foliage do curl a little over time after they have been pressed, but if you have only just removed them from your flower press and they immediately start curling, this is most likely a sign that they still have some moisture in them and they need to be pressed for a little longer.

Pressings sticking to paper when removing them from the flower press

Some flowers need a bit of encouragement to let go of your blotting paper. Bend the paper a little and you should find the edges start to lift off the page. You can then use your tweezers to slowly and carefully lift the pressing away from the paper.

Parts falling off your pressings when you remove them from the flower press

This can happen; it’s often a sign that the flower you pressed was an older bloom that was nearing the end of flowering, much like a flower in the garden will start dropping its petals as it ages.

Pretty pressed fuchsias. These flowers take me straight back to my childhood and the delights of my grandparents' garden.

CHAPTER 06

Creating with Pressed Flowers

CREATIVE INSPIRATION

Once your flowers have been pressed, it's completely joyful to turn them into a creation to be enjoyed. Pleasingly, working with pressed flowers further increases our connection to nature—it's during the creative process where you often really notice all of the little details in your pressings. It really is true that the more you look, the more you see.

There's no right or wrong when it comes to creating with pressed flowers. The possibilities are endless, and one of the most magical qualities when working with an artform that is born from nature is that each creation will always be completely unique—a one-of-a-kind celebration of a perfect moment in time. I love seeing the creations that are made at my flower-pressing workshops—I'm repeatedly thrilled by how, even when they are all using similar pressings, the individuality and personal style of each creator shines through in the artwork they make, and no two pieces are ever the same.

There's one technique that's really helpful to perfect, and that is how to successfully work with glue to achieve top-quality creations. Therefore, a section follows that will explain in detail how to glue your pressings (here). Art and the act of creating is different for each one of us, so rather than tell you exactly how you should work with your pressings, I'm instead going to give you some different ideas of projects you could try. (There are some lovely seasonal projects later in the book for further inspiration.)

I love spending days in my studio creating with my pressed flowers—I lose all track of time and feel so relaxed.

I'll also offer a few tips that might help you to get started. After this, I'm simply going to encourage you to give it a go and see where the creative process takes you.

In terms of your workspace, I find I like to stand at my workbench when I'm working on designs as this enables me to see the piece from above and from the best angle. I then usually sit when I'm glueing the piece, although sometimes I stand; it all depends on how I feel! Do what works for you, whether that be standing, sitting, or a combination of both. Below are some ideas for creating with your pressed flowers. The possibilities really are endless, so if you think of another project you'd like to try, give it a go!

Project Ideas

FRAMED ARTWORK

There are so many different styles to explore when it comes to pressed-flower artwork: elegant single flower stems; striking collages full of colour and shapes; bouquet styles with gorgeous flowing stems; and pieces that combine pressed flowers with other forms of artwork, such as incorporating them within a drawing. To finish your piece, make sure you use a frame with a glass overlay to help protect the flowers.

GREETINGS CARDS

Birthdays, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, Christmas, weddings, new babies, in sympathy; there are so many situations where receiving a thoughtful handmade pressed-flower card is appreciated.

FESTIVE DECORATIONS

There are lots of different ways to create festive decorations with your pressings, such as using ceramic baubles or ornaments, air-dried clay shapes, or glass baubles. They can be decorated with festive foliage or with flowers that can be enjoyed all year long.

GIFT TAGS

A gift tag is a lovely quick project that really elevates a gift to someone special.

RESIN PIECES

I don't work with resin, as I prefer to keep my work as natural as possible; however, there are some really lovely ways to use resin to encase pressed flowers in jewellery, trays, ornaments, and keyrings. Always take care and follow all of the safety instructions if you decide to use resin. There are lots of how-to guides available online to help you get started.

DÉCOUPAGE

You can découpage your pressings onto all sorts of different surfaces, and you can also combine them with other materials such as tissue paper. Wooden boxes, glass jars, wooden ornaments, vases, stones; there are so many possibilities.

BOOKMARKS

I remember making a pressed viola flower bookmark with my mum when I was a child—it was my very first floral creation! They are a lovely starter activity for young flower-pressers and also make great gifts.

Don’t forget that your pressed-flower creations need to be kept away from humid environments and out of direct sunlight.

TIPS FOR ARTWORK

If you are mounting your pressings onto card or paper, make sure it is **acid-free.** Using different types of card or paper can really change the look of your artwork—a bright white background gives a more contemporary look, whereas a textured handmade paper (I love to use **lokta paper**) gives a more rustic feel. Choose card or paper that is at least **80 gsm (50 lb)** and has a bit of texture to it, as this will help the pressings to adhere well. Pressed-flower art also looks great with different coloured backgrounds, and dark backgrounds can really make the pressings pop. However, a word of caution when using dark backgrounds—some flowers work better than others. The dark colours can show through those with very delicate, thin petals and dull the colours of the flowers.

This mesmerising artwork is made entirely of pressed dahlia petals—there are five different varieties of dahlia in the piece.

When handling your pressings, it's best to **use tweezers** as much as possible—using your fingers can damage them or leave marks. In terms of **deciding on your composition,** it can be helpful to have an idea of a design in mind, but it's also enjoyable to just lay all of your pressings out and then start placing those you are drawn to onto your card and see what happens!

You might want to consider different **colour combinations.** Do you want a harmonious piece full of similar colours, or a striking piece full of contrasting colours? Similarly with shapes and forms, it can be helpful to look for pressings that will bring movement and flow to the piece.

I also find working with **odd numbers** of pressings helps. This is a common design trick often used in interior styling—for example having three or five of a particular flower within your piece creates a visually appealing composition. Consider **spacing,** too, allowing space to ensure the unique shape and character of each flower is optimised. If a piece is too busy, details can get lost; often, *less is more*. It's very easy to get carried away and keep adding more and more flowers, but I'd encourage you to also think about taking flowers out of your composition if needed to find a good balance.

For **collage-style artwork,** incorporating different shapes and sizes of pressings will bring lots of flow and interest to the piece. When I create in this style, I place the larger pressings into position first, always looking for interesting curvy stems and shapes to add movement. I then start building the design up by filling in the spaces, reducing the size of the pressings as the piece builds, so that any small gaps that are left can be filled with tiny flowers such as forget-me-nots or individual petals. This approach results in a nice even and cohesive design.

If you ever find yourself *struggling* to come up with a design, it might simply be that your brain just isn't feeling creative at that moment. This is very common, and it regularly happens to artists and others who work creatively. Don't worry—instead I'd recommend accepting that today just isn't your day, stepping away, and coming back to it another day.

I like to create a **draft design** (often tweaking it for hours!) before I start glueing. I'll then leave it in draft form and come back to it the next day, looking at it with a fresh perspective to check that I'm still happy. Before I glue anything down, I always take a photograph of the design, and have this within reach as a point of reference as I glue.

Pressed achillea stems on lokta paper in a stunning vintage frame.

Carefully placing a pressed buttercup stem onto beautiful handmade lokta paper.

For some styles, such as a collage where there is space between each pressing, you can **leave everything** *in-situ* as you glue. Using tweezers, lift the pressing you want to glue, apply your glue—see the next section (p. 108) for a guide on glueing technique—and then place it back in position and gently firm down. Try not to lean across a piece where flowers aren't yet glued down, as you can knock things out of place. I find it best to start glueing from the bottom corner (bottom-right if you are right-handed, or bottom-left if you are left-handed, like me!), and work my way across and

upwards. It is slow, mindful, meticulous work, and an intricate piece can take many days to complete.

For styles where you have **overlapping pressings,** such as a bouquet piece with intertwined stems, make sure you've taken a photograph of your design, as you'll need to take everything off the page and start over when glueing each pressing into place.

It can feel a little intimidating when it comes to the point where you need to glue your pressed flowers; it's easy to overthink the process and panic! Before you start working on a final piece of artwork, I'd recommend having a **thorough practice** with lots of different types of pressings.

This is a good way to use any pressings that aren't quite good enough for your final creations: they'll still work perfectly well for practicing with! Take your time and experiment with glueing individual petals, full flowers, and stems to help build your confidence and to expand your knowledge of the tiny little nuances that each different variety of pressing has. As with most things, the more times you do it, the better you'll get. Once you've mastered the glueing technique, it's very easy to get completely absorbed in your work, in the flow, losing all concept of time—it's a wonderfully meditative experience.

One final tip: When you are working with pressed flowers, you'll sometimes find that tiny bits may drop off onto the space you are working on. This isn't a problem, unless of course you instinctively perform the very human reaction of trying to **blow** the tiny fragment away, and in doing so you also blow away every single piece of your artwork that isn't glued down! You may laugh now, but I can guarantee you'll end up doing it!

A landscape-style artwork featuring dancing stems on a black background.

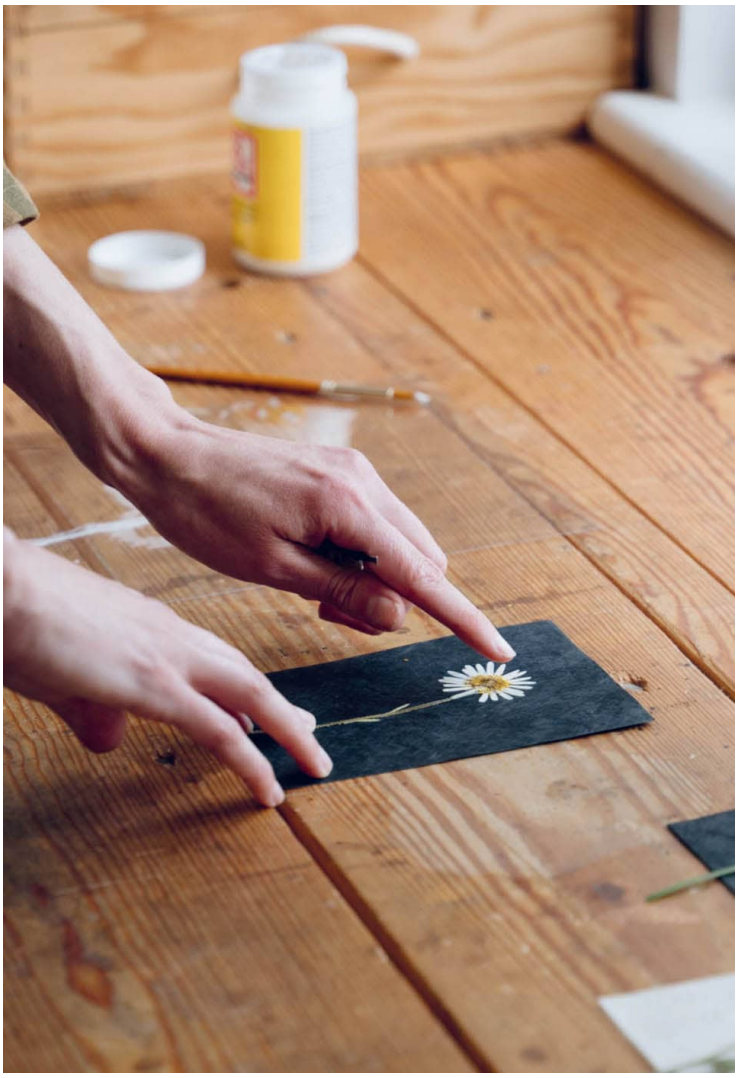
GLUEING TECHNIQUES

Traditional herbarium sheets hold their pressings in place with little strips of gummed linen tape, which does have a lovely nostalgic look, and works well in herbaria where the pressings are stored away and flat rather than being on display. However, for artwork and other creations that are going to be on show, it's really important that they are glued securely into place.

A common oversight I've observed when people are glueing their pressings is the tendency to rush the process by merely placing a single dot of glue on the back of the flower and sticking it down. In theory, this will hold the flower in place. However, because most of the flower isn't secured, over time the parts that aren't glued will start to curl away from the background, the petals are likely to wrinkle, and the pressing will lose some of its form.

I've developed a successful glueing technique that ensures the pressings have an even coating of glue on the back so that they are secured neatly and elegantly. It does take time and patience, but the results are beautiful and can really elevate the look of your finished artwork. This technique is where the sheet of acetate in the equipment list is used—you place your pressing face down on the acetate sheet, use your paintbrush to paint a light coating of glue over the whole pressing, deliberately going over all of the edges onto the acetate sheet to ensure every part of the pressing is coated, and then you can bend the sheet a little to help you lift off your pressing with your tweezers before glueing it into place on your chosen surface.

There are some additional steps for certain flowers (those with extra nuances such as overlapping petals), but the glueing of every pressing begins with the acetate sheet method. A step-by-step guide follows.



Glueing a lovely pressed daisy flower onto black lokta paper.

Equipment

PAINTBRUSH

Using a paintbrush to apply glue to your pressings is the best technique. The brush is gentle on your pressings, reducing the risk of them tearing as you apply the glue, and painting the glue on means you can get a really lovely, even coating of glue over the whole of your pressing. I have found paintbrushes sold for use with acrylic paint work well, and I use different sizes depending on the size of the pressings I'm working with. Because you'll be working with water-based glue, simply wash your brushes when you have finished creating and they'll be clean and ready to use again. Make sure your brushes are fully dry before starting your next project.

KNIFE AND CUTTING BOARD

If you need to trim any untidy edges or cut a pressing to size, using your knife and cutting board is really helpful, as you can make neat and accurate cuts.

TWEEZERS

It’s always best to handle your pressings with tweezers. This is particularly helpful when you start glueing, as it keeps the glue off your fingers (well, most of it!).

ACETATE SHEET

This may sound like a bit of an unusual requirement, but it’s a real gamechanger when it comes to successfully glueing your pressed flowers. This will be further explained in the glueing techniques section (here). You can reuse your acetate sheet many times.

SURFACE TO MOUNT YOUR FLOWERS ONTO

This might be card, paper, glass, ceramic, wood, fabric, or any other surface you'd like to decorate with your pressings.

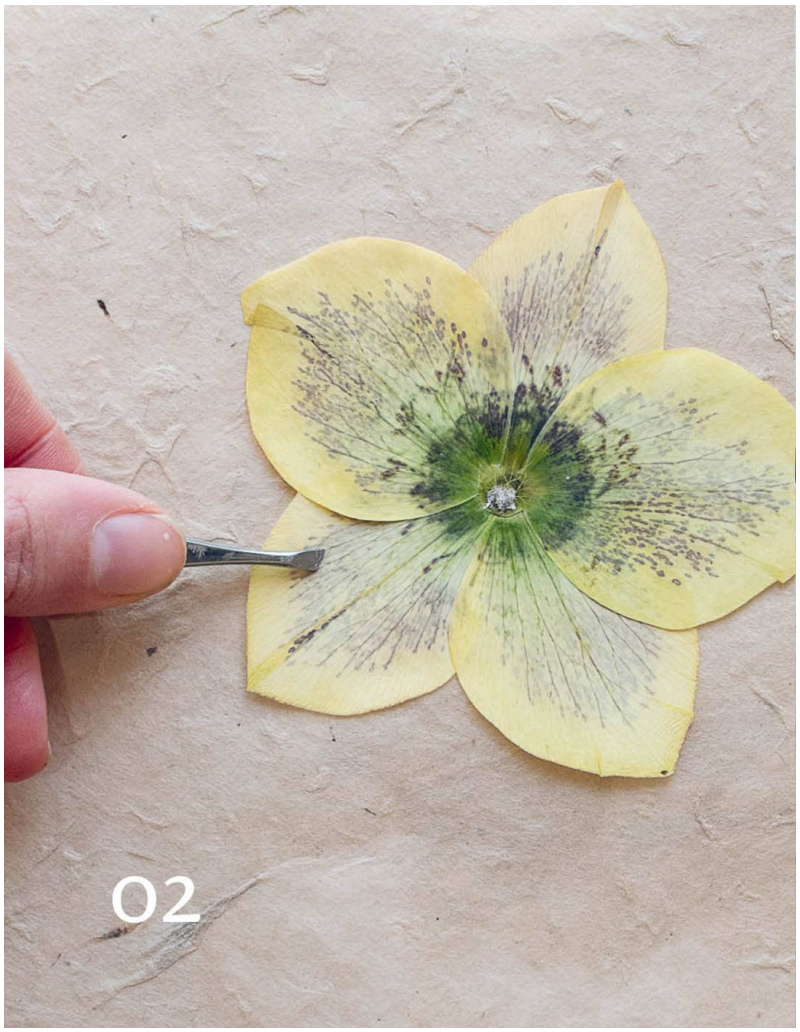
WATER-BASED WHITE GLUE

Most water-based white glues, such as PVA, can be used to glue pressed flowers. Always ensure your glue is water-based, as stronger glues are likely to damage or burn your delicate pressings. My favourite glue to use is Matte Mod Podge, which you can find in craft shops.

Have all of your equipment ready, and make sure you've decided on your composition and trimmed your pressings to size, if needed, using your knife and cutting block.

TIP

I like to select out the pressings I'm going to work with and let these inspire and guide the piece I'll create.



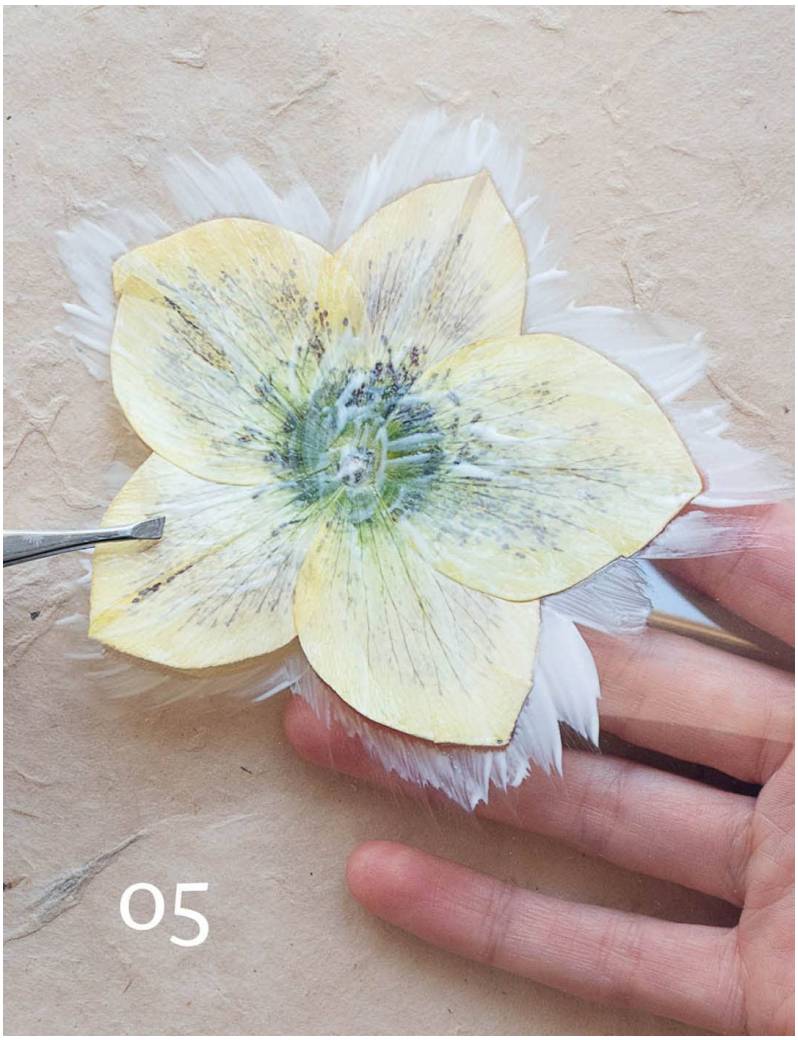
Place your pressing face down on the acetate sheet.

Place your finger on part of the pressing to hold it still. Using your paintbrush, coat the back of the pressing with a thin layer of glue. The aim is to paint *beyond* the edges of your pressing and slightly onto the acetate sheet, ensuring that every part of the back of the pressing has glue on it.

TIP

I like to work from the centre outwards when applying glue to full flower heads, working in the same direction as each petal.

Lift your finger and paint the small remaining section where your finger was with glue.



Bending the acetate sheet a little, use your tweezers to lift off the pressing (you will get a little bit of glue on the tweezers—that's fine!).

TIP

Try to lift the pressing from the centre rather than from an edge, as the centre tends to be stronger.

You’ll notice an outline of your pressing painted in glue left on your acetate sheet—this is really helpful, as it’ll identify any areas you might have missed!

Turn your pressing face up and place it gently onto your paper or surface you are creating on.

If the pressing doesn’t sit quite how you want it to, you can carefully lift and rearrange it using your tweezers until it looks right.

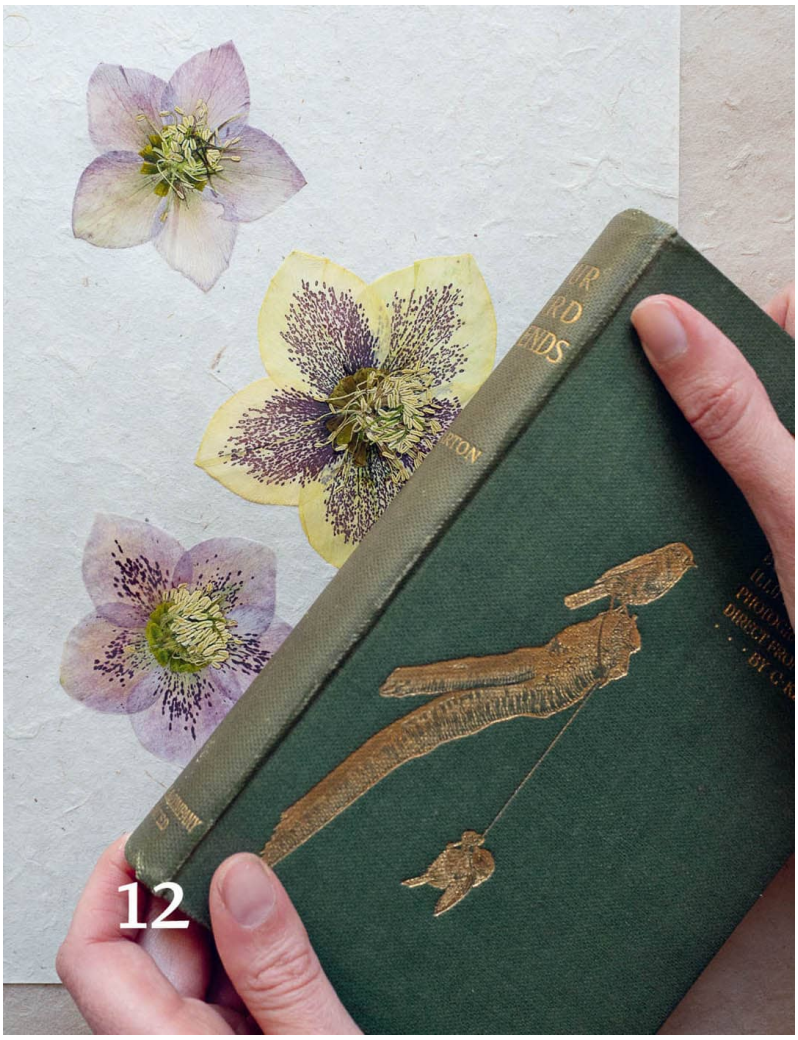
Once you're happy with the position, gently firm your pressing down by applying light pressure with your finger.

TIP

I like to work from the centre outwards for whole flowers, or from one end upwards for leaves, stems, and petals. If there's any glue on show, you can wipe it away with your finger.

After a couple of minutes, check that all of the edges look well secured. If any of them are lifting, paint a tiny bit of extra glue on the underside and firm down.

Repeat steps 2–10 if you are adding more pressings to your creation.



After an hour, you can place a heavy book on top to help keep it flat as it dries. Leave it to dry for 24 hours.

ADVANCED GLUEING TECHNIQUES

As I mentioned before, some pressings are a bit more complex and require some additional glueing steps.

Glueing Overlapping Petals

Where a flower has petals that overlap (for example, violas, cosmos, hellebores), after you've glued the back and secured it to your paper, you'll need to apply some extra glue on the sections where they overlap; otherwise, the parts of the petals that aren't glued are likely to lift and curl over time.

Using your tweezers, very carefully lift up the part of the petal that overlaps and isn’t yet glued down. Remember it will be glued down at the point where the overlap ends.

Using your paintbrush, paint a thin layer of glue either onto the back of the petal you have lifted or onto the petal it will sit on, if that's easier.

TIP

Use a very fine paintbrush for this.

Firm it down using your finger. Repeat until all petals are fully secured and leave it to dry for 24 hours.

Reconstructing a Flower

Where a flower has been taken apart for pressing, I always recommend taking a photograph of it in its natural shape before you deconstruct and press it, so that you have a reference point for how it should look when you recreate it.

Lay all of the elements of your flower out on your paper in the design you want them to take.

As these flowers typically have layers of petals, you'll next need to move it off your paper and then start glueing each petal into place.

TIP

Before you move it off your paper, take a photograph of it, and then place each petal to the side in reverse order of the order in which you'll need to glue them.

Glue each element into place, building up the layers of petals and any other details (centres, stems, leaves, and so on). Leave it to dry for 24 hours.

Reconstructing Multiple Stems

If you cut a multi-stem flower into lots of separate stems to press it, you can neatly glue it all back together and no one will ever know you took it apart.

Lay out all of your stems into an arrangement you are happy with. Make sure that all of the points where separate stems are going to be rejoined are touching. You can trim and shape these joins if needed to make it look seamless.

TIP

It can be helpful to take a photograph of your design to help you to know where to place each stem when you start glueing.

Start by glueing the main stem into place.

TIP

You don't necessarily need to move all of the other stems completely off the page, but it helps to make a bit of space whilst you are glueing your pressings down to ensure you don't accidentally get glue on other stems as you create. I like to place them around the outside of my paper near the point where they'll be positioned once glued.

Repeat for each stem until it is all glued into place. Leave it to dry for 24 hours.

Other Details

Some flowers are made up of lots of tiny little flowers, such as the centre of an astrantia flower, or the gorgeous pincushion heads of scabious. If these aren’t secured into place, they may lift over time or even fall off as the flower ages. A coating of glue over the loose parts means they’ll stay in place.

Using your paintbrush, paint a light layer of glue over all the parts of the flower that are loose or have the potential to become loose over time.

Anything that needs a bit of encouragement to stick down can be gently guided with your tweezers, applying light pressure until it stays in place. After a couple of minutes, check that everything looks secure and apply more glue if needed. Leave it to dry for 24 hours.

TIP

This is where a glue that dries to a matte finish is really helpful, ensuring there's no shine left once the glue has dried.

A Few Notes on Glue

I've found the Matte Mod Podge glue to be my favourite to work with. It's reliable, forgiving if you apply a bit too much and need to wipe it away, and it dries to an almost completely matte finish, so you hardly know it's there. A container also lasts a very long time, as you will only use very small amounts of it with each creation.

When it comes to applying glue, it's better to under-apply rather than apply too much. If you don't use quite enough glue on your first go, you can always lift it off and apply more, but if you get over-excited and put too much glue on, it can cause delicate petals to wrinkle or even fold and stick to themselves as you try to place them onto your paper. This can be very frustrating—I find wild poppy petals are particularly prone to sticking to themselves as you try to glue them as the petals are so thin and fragile. (If you are working with poppies, I wish you luck!)

There's no need to rush when you are painting the back of your pressing with glue; take your time and make sure everything is neatly and evenly coated. You have a good few minutes before the glue will start to set, which is plenty of time, even for coating larger pressings.

Glueing is often the element of pressed-flower art that people find the most challenging. The more you practice, the easier it becomes. I now find it a very mindful activity, and get completely absorbed in it, often working for hours before realising a tea break is overdue! That reminds me—if you do take a break from glueing, even if just for ten minutes, I'd recommend washing the brush you were using and starting with a different one when you come back, as otherwise the brush will have begun to harden as the glue cures.

CHAPTER 07

Floriography: The Secret Language of Flowers

THE MEANING OF FLOWERS

Many flowers are steeped in folklore and have beautiful stories and meanings behind them. Exploring the language of flowers, known as 'floriography', makes flowers all the more intriguing and interesting to work with, and opens up the opportunity to select a specific flower to press and create with for the purpose of communicating a special message.

There are flowers for love, remembrance, new beginnings, luck, protection, and more. There are even flowers for revenge, but that's not particularly in-keeping with this book; I'll let you research those yourself!

It’s lovely to grow flowers that have special meanings.

You can find many beautifully detailed books on floriography and floral folklore; I’d recommend sourcing some of these if you’d like to learn more. To touch upon this wonderful concept, the following pages explore the symbolism and stories around three well-known flowers, all of which can be pressed to create meaningful pieces to treasure.

Forget-me-nots, roses, and daisies have delightful meanings.

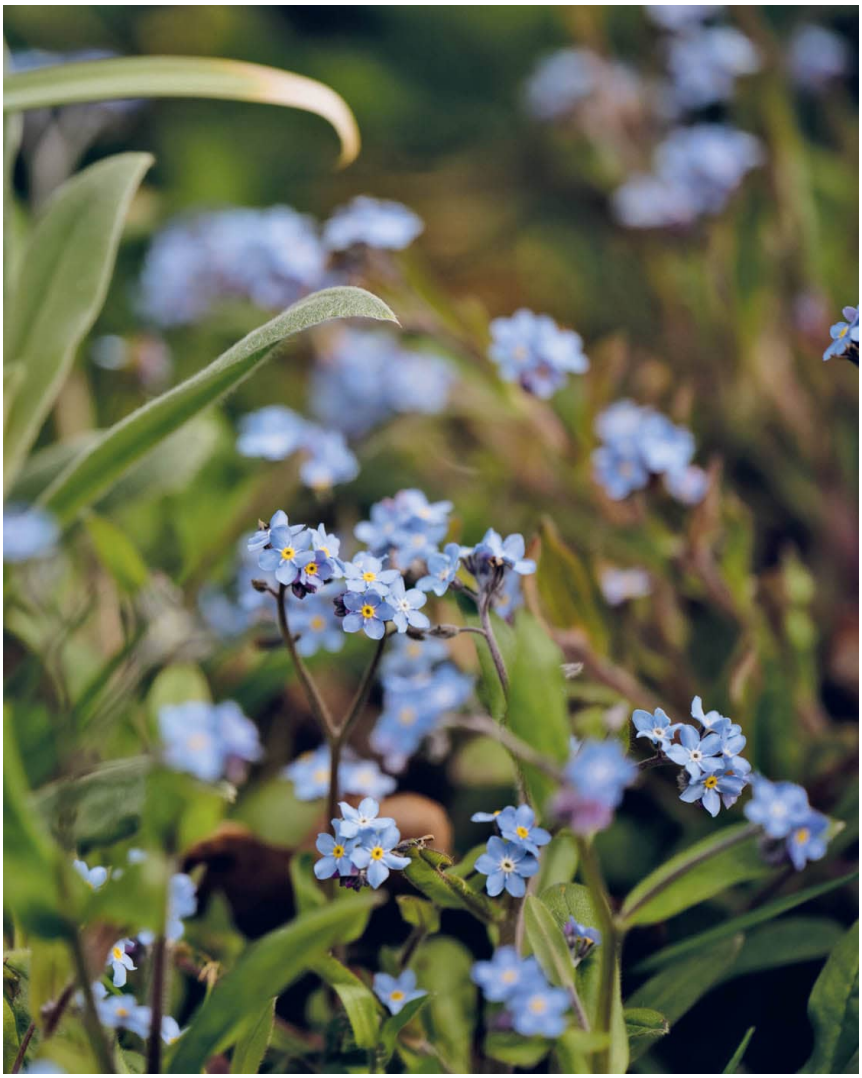
Forget-Me-Not

Forget-me-nots are a symbol of eternal love, remembrance, and devotion. They can be gifted in love and happiness, or to bring comfort during times of grief.

Pieces featuring these little wonders are my bestsellers, so it seems their beautiful, emotive meaning is recognised and admired by many others too.

Forget-me-nots are such timeless, enchanting little flowers. They'll always be special to me, as pressing them marked the start of my Meadow and Thyme journey. Every time I see these gorgeous happy flowers, I'm reminded of my wonderful Granny. In loving memory of both of my grandmothers, I have encased two forget-me-not flowers inside a gorgeous vintage locket. It is cherished every day.

I would never be without these little gems in my garden and they are such reliable plants to grow. They readily self-seed, are happy to be dug up and replanted if they pop up in a space where you don't want them, and the fantastic carpet of blue they form each spring makes for my absolute favourite time of year in the garden. Forget-me-nots are also great for pressing; they are incredibly reliable to work with and can be pressed as gorgeous flowing stems or as divine tiny individual flowers.



Rose

Roses are a widely recognised symbol of love. In floriography, different coloured roses have different meanings; red for true love, white for purity, yellow for friendship, orange for passion, and pink for happiness.

Roses are one of our most recognised and best-loved flowers. Traditionally gifted to show love, and often featured in wedding bouquets, there really is something very romantic about these beautiful blooms.

There are many different varieties, shapes, and forms of roses. The simple flower heads of wild, rambling roses can be pressed whole

(however, I’d still recommend trimming off as many juicy bits as possible first!). The more traditional bouquet-style roses have many layers and thick centres, so these must be deconstructed before pressing. There is also something very charming about pressing individual petals, some of which, either on their own or when you place two together, form pretty heart shapes. Similarly, rose leaves are stunning when pressed—especially young freshly emerged leaves, which often have gorgeous red tones within them.

Daisy

Daisies are a symbol of purity, joy, and new beginnings, and are often gifted to welcome a new life into the world. They also represent loyalty—perfect for letting someone know you are there to support them through life's ups and downs.

Daisies come in many different sizes and forms. From the tiny little wild daisies that pop up in our lawns to the larger whimsical wild oxeye daisies and colourful varieties such as sturdy gerberas, they all feature distinctive happy little faces and are full of personality. I have lots of wild daisies growing in my lawn (they are so very welcome!), and oxeye daisies grow in abundance all over the garden. They are great for nature, as they are nectar-rich, and I always find the clumped leaves of oxeye daisies are absolutely full of sheltering wildlife—caterpillars, spiders, ladybirds, and beetles all living together in harmony in little plant-shaped villages!

Simpler daisy varieties are the best to press. Tiny wild daisies are perfect and utterly gorgeous—the detail retained in the centres of the flowers is of particular interest, and if you search for them, you can sometimes find flowers with the most delicate touches of pink on the very ends of the petals. I find many larger daisies are too thick to allow for good pressings. You can reduce how thick the centres are by carefully cutting some of the back off, or deconstructing them and pressing the petals separately from the thicker centres. It's also really important to work with young blooms, as the older the flower, the more likely that the disc florets (the centres) will have begun turning to seed, increasing the chances they will fall apart after pressing.

CHAPTER 08

Seasonal Inspiration

SEASONAL LIVING

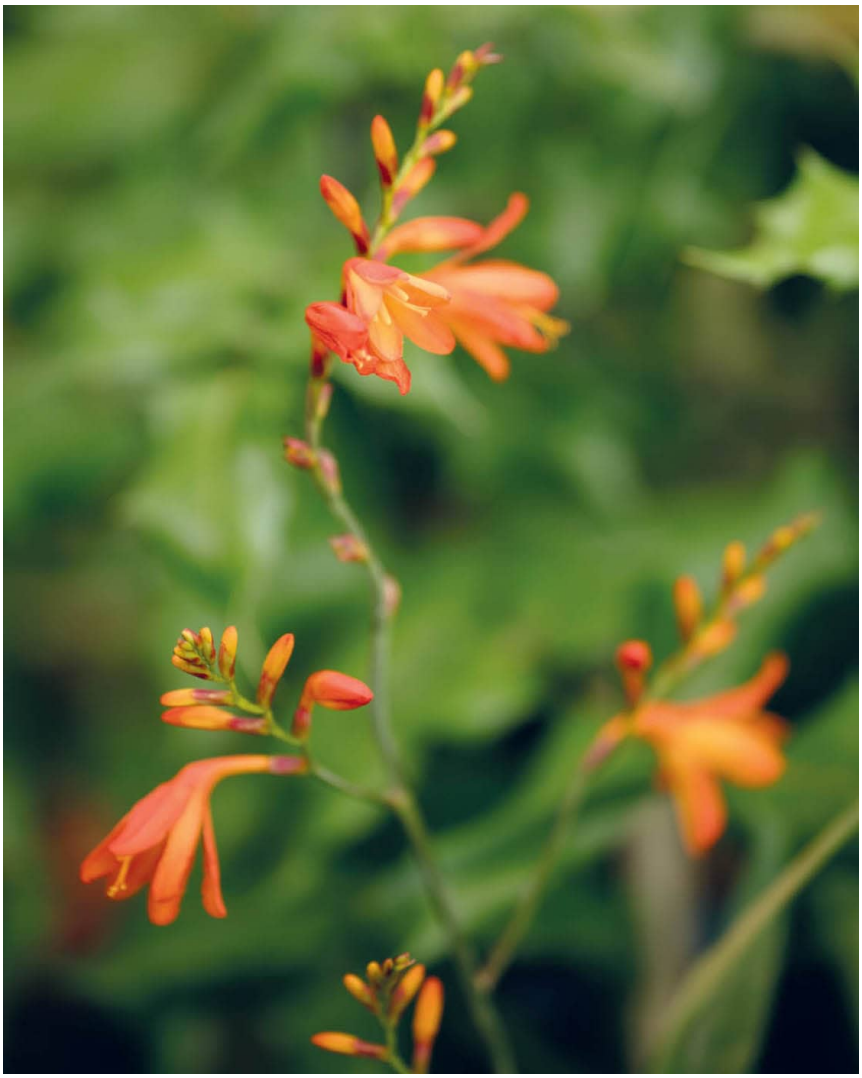
Embracing the seasons, recognising that each is completely magical and wonderful, noticing subtle changes, enjoying the unique sensations and emotions that each brings, and leaning in to how nature's energies ebb and flow—is nothing less than life-affirming. Once we start to see the little nuances and delights that each season gifts to us, we can feel so much more connected and alive.

I fully encourage you to live seasonally: to rejoice in the vibrant abundance of summer, appreciate the gentle transformation to cosy autumn days, accept the healing slow days of winter, and welcome the rejuvenation of spring. Each season gives us so much to be grateful for if we *allow ourselves the time to notice*.

One of the many joys of flower pressing is that there is always something to press, gifting us with a beautiful way to capture memories and celebrate all of the seasons. You may have to look a little harder or think more creatively in winter, but there is endless treasure to be found.

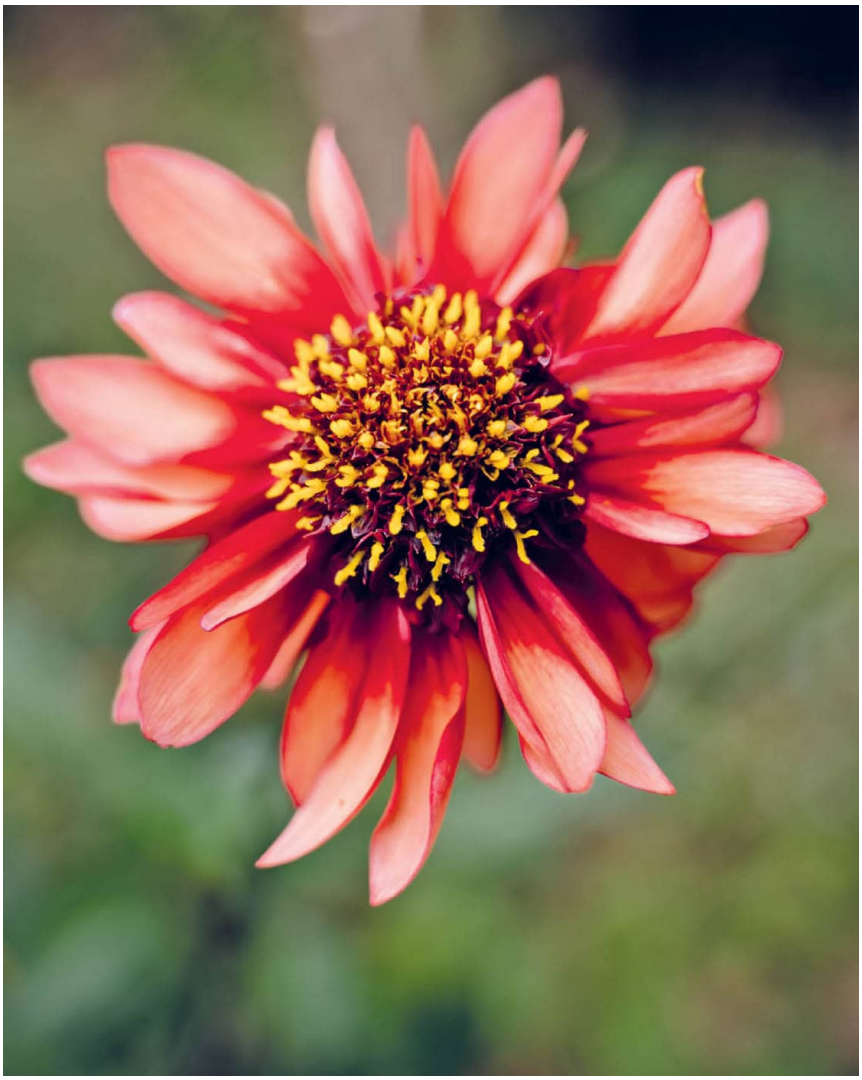
Join me on a journey through the seasons in the Meadow and Thyme garden . . .

Cowslips in spring



Crocosmias in summer

Snowdrops in winter



Dahlias in autumn

SPRING

Stirring, awakening, joyful spring. The garden starts to bubble with life—green shoots emerge, birds fill the sky with their melodies, flowers unfurl, brave little insects start to surface, and the subtle warmth of the sunshine fills the garden with hope and joy.

—

Each day offers more and more—new seedlings, new buds, blossoms, the buzz of a bumblebee taking her first clumsy flight of the year. Spring is such an uplifting time of year, full of anticipation, excitement, and palpable rising energies. Nature breathes deeply, celebrates resilience and rebirth, and welcomes back vibrance and life.

SPRING PRESSINGS

Spring is my favourite time of year for flower pressing. There's something remarkable and endearing about resilient little spring flowers. As they start to bloom and bring colour and hope to the garden, I always feel a change in my own energy too: feeling revived, hopeful, and deeply grateful for the return of the light and warmth.

Many of the flowers that greet us in spring are excellent for pressing. Violas, primulas, and forget-me-nots all have wonderfully simple forms and press beautifully, retaining their incredible vibrant colours. Aquilegias (also known as 'columbine') are also great for pressing—I love pressing whole stems, especially if I can find some with interesting curves to them.

Later in the season, lily of the valley make lovely pressings—they turn a gorgeous vintage cream colour and look superb mounted onto a dark background (*note that they are toxic, so be sure to wash your hands thoroughly whenever you handle them*). Individual peony petals are also delightful when pressed, with the deep pinks and burgundies a particularly enticing spectacle.

There's also an abundance of newly emerged leaves, full of zesty green hues. Try pressing fabulously feathery yarrow leaves, young rose leaves, and incredible sorrel leaves with their contrasting colour patterns—absolutely divine!

Geums are wonderful flowers to press. They are always so vibrant and the stems, leaves, flowers, and seedheads all press well.

SPRING HIGHLIGHTS

Anemone
Aquilegia
Blossom
Buttercup
Butterfly ranunculus
Cowslip
Crocus
Forget-me-not
Geum
Lily of the valley
Peony petals
Primula
Viola
Wild primrose

Pretty primulas

SPRING PROJECT

Pressed Flower in a Vintage Frame

Pressed flowers look wonderful in vintage frames.

Pairing beautifully pressed flowers with characterful vintage frames makes for a perfect match. They are both full of magic and stories, and combining them, alongside gorgeous textured paper, always results in really special pieces. It also means that as your pressings slowly fade over time, the artwork is further elevated to one that truly captures the joy and charm of the vintage aesthetic. I love searching for vintage frames at second-hand markets and in antiques shops; it’s always exciting when I find one! I use

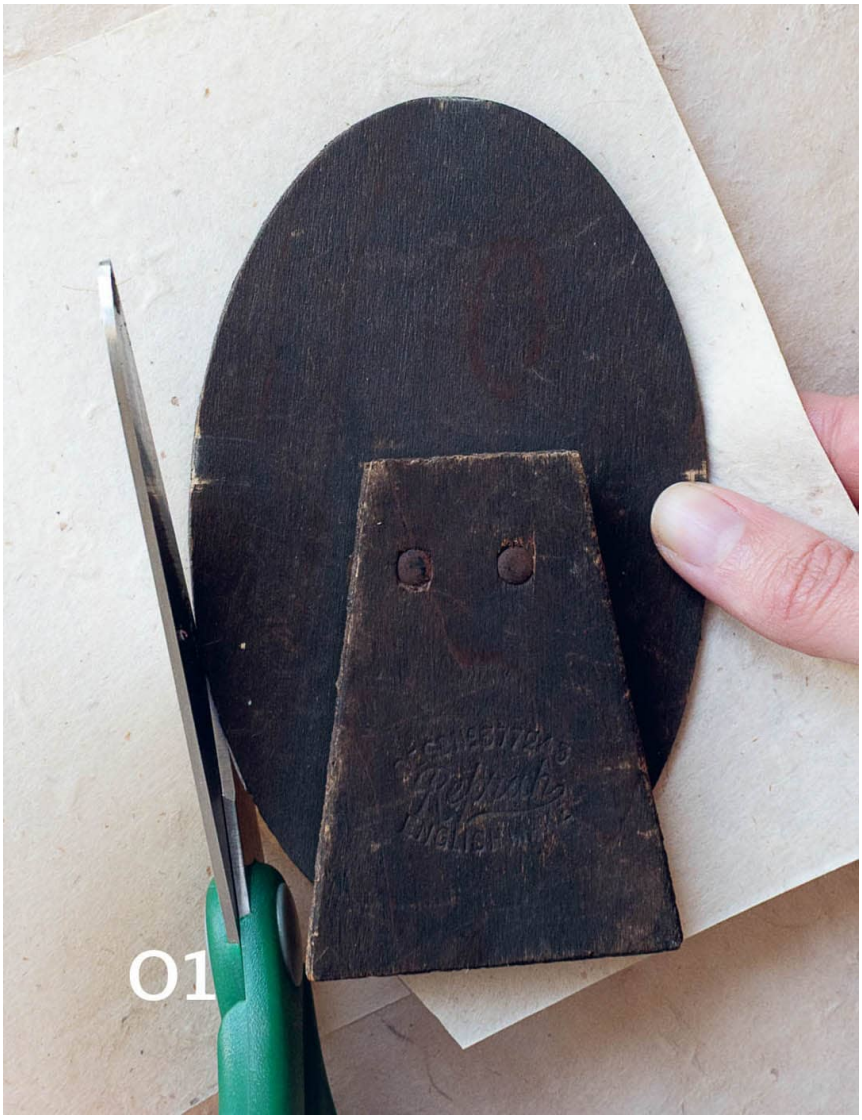
handmade fairtrade lokta paper for the background on my vintage pieces (sourced from various art shops); it brings a lovely warmth and extra depth with its delightful textures.

YOU WILL NEED

Scissors
Textured paper
Pressed flowers or foliage
Acetate sheet
Paintbrush
Water-based white glue
Tweezers
Heavy book (optional)
Vintage frame
Glass cleaning cloth

TIP

You may need to give the vintage frame a clean before using it.



Cut the paper to size so that it fits your frame.

Choose a pressing that fits well within your frame; trim to size if needed. I'm working with a crocus flower for this piece.

TIP

Remember to think about interesting shapes and forms. I like to place the frame over the paper as I choose my pressing to give me a good idea of how it will look when finished.

Place your pressing face down on your acetate sheet and, using your paintbrush, apply the glue.

Using your tweezers, carefully lift the pressing off the acetate sheet and place it into position.

Gently firm your pressing down onto the paper. After a couple of minutes, check that all parts are adhered to the paper, and apply more glue if there are any edges lifting.

Leave it to dry for 24 hours.

TIP

After it has been drying for an hour, you can place a book on top of the piece to help keep it flat.

Carefully place your finished piece into the frame and secure the back.

Wipe the glass with a cleaning cloth to make sure there aren't any fingerprints on it!

VARIATIONS

I like the simplicity of featuring a single flower type in my frames, but you could experiment with having multiple varieties of flowers and different design styles (collage, bouquet, and so on).

SUMMER

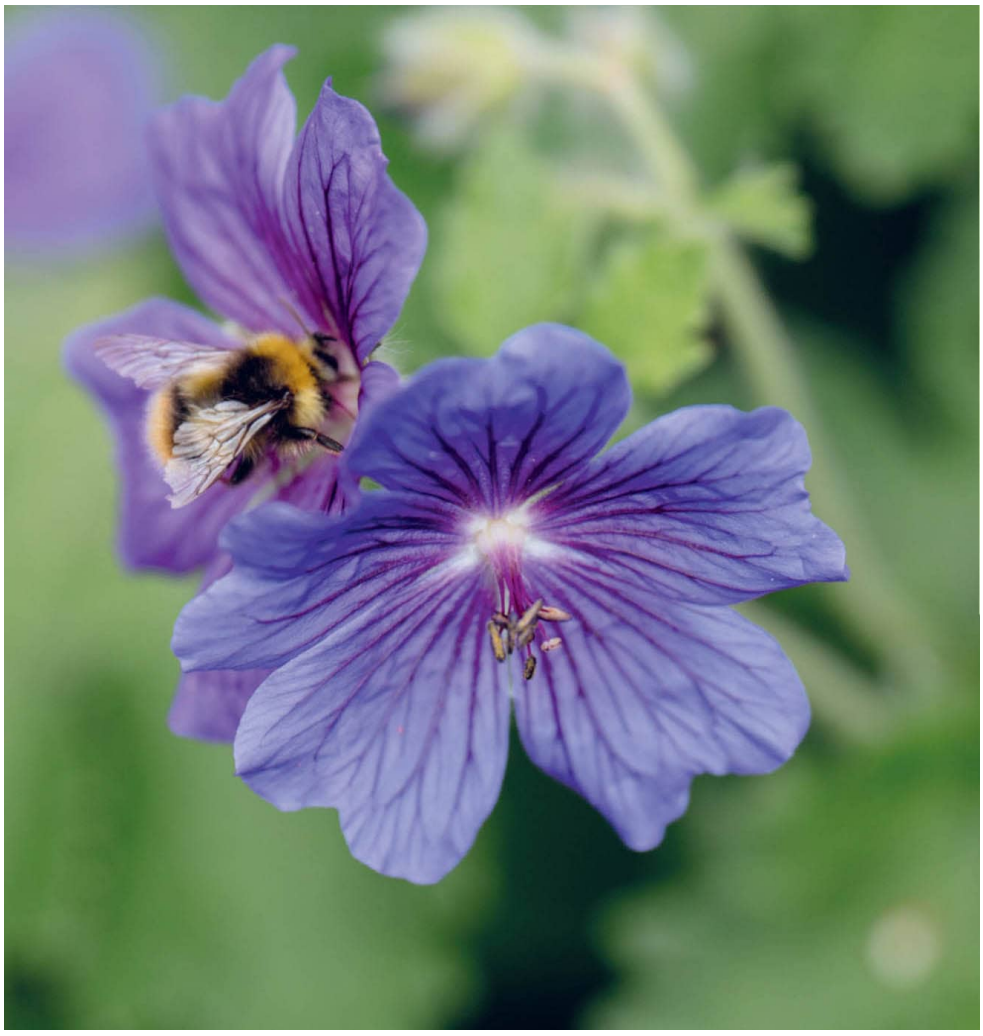
Abundant, vibrant, generous summer. The garden is bursting with life, a patchwork of rainbow colours framed with zesty greens. Tall flowers sway in the breeze, butterflies dance around, busy bees gather nectar, and the energy in the warm air is palpable. There's so much to see during the long hot days of summer; a period to notice, practice gratitude, and savour every moment. This is the time when nature is at its richest, nurturing all of our senses, and uplifting us with warmth, energy, and positivity.

SUMMER PRESSINGS

The most generous of all of the seasons, summer really does spoil us with bountiful amounts of amazing flowers and foliage to press. This is the time of year when the flowers in the garden really draw me in. It seems the more I pick, the more I see, and I always find I need one more flower press!

There are so many different colours and textures to explore; from vibrant crocosmia, cornflowers, and lavender, through to delicate muted ammi majus, meadow grasses, and happy little daisies.

It is also the season of fabulous tendrils—these incredible forms reach, wind, and curl their way through the summer months, helping plants such as fragrant sweet peas to grow tall. They press brilliantly and bring so much character and movement to pressed-flower artwork.



Gorgeous geraniums.

SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS

Achillea
Alchemilla mollis
Ammi majus
Astrantia
Cornflower
Crocosmia
Daisy
Fennel
Geranium
Grasses
Gypsophila
Larkspur
Lavender
Limonium
Linaria
Lobelia
Nigella
Pelargonium
Queen Anne's lace (wild carrot)
Rose
Scabious
Sweet pea

Queen Anne’s lace flowers (also known as wild carrot) are truly spectacular when pressed and look striking on a dark background.

SUMMER PROJECT

Greetings Card

It’s heartwarming to receive a handmade card.

It’s always special to receive a handmade card; a perfect way to let someone know you are thinking of them. They are a joy to make too—I often start with a plan to make one and end up making many more! It’s lovely to include the recipient’s favourite flower, or perhaps a symbolic flower to help portray a thoughtful message. The cards are fairly delicate, so do bear that in mind if you are wanting to post it to someone (especially if there is rain forecast; soggy pressed-flower mail isn’t fun!). I have sent many in the

post and they have been fine, but if you are worried, perhaps pop it in a padded outer envelope or a little postal box to keep it safe.

YOU WILL NEED

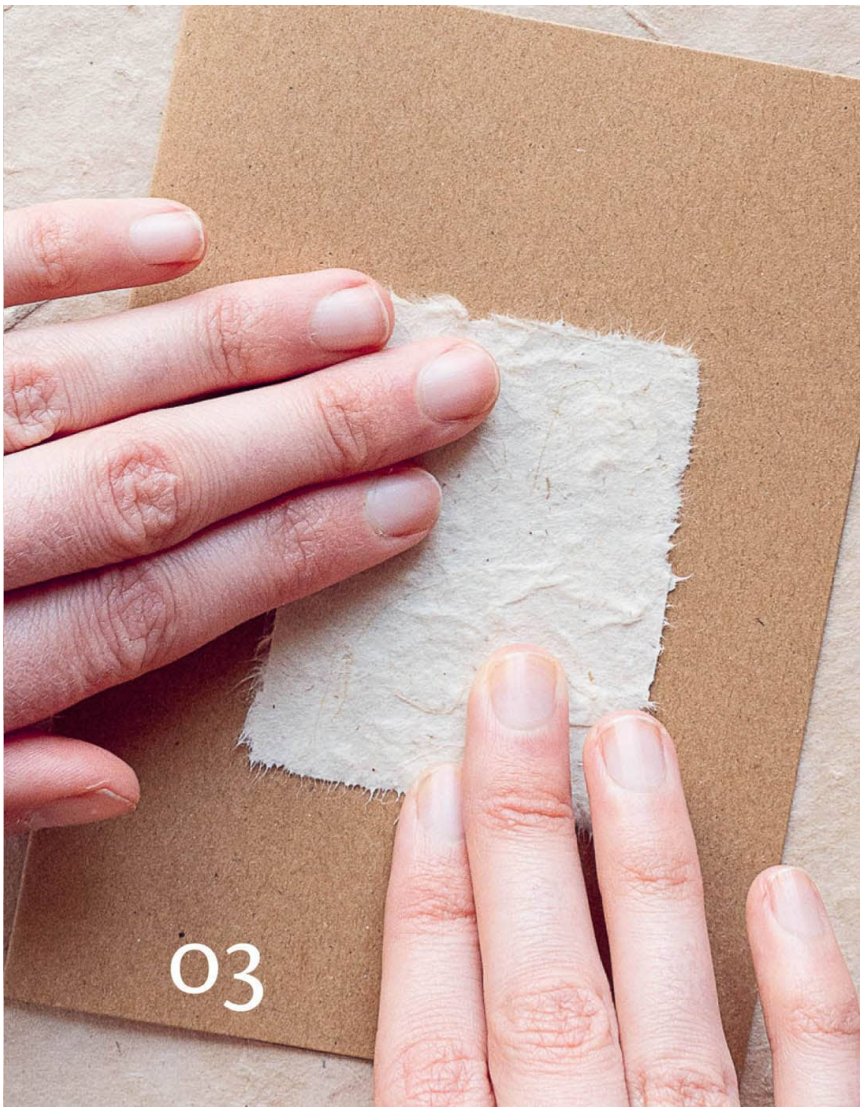
Card and envelope
Lokta paper
Ruler
Acetate sheet
Paintbrush
Water-based white glue
Tweezers
Pressed flowers or foliage
Heavy book (optional)

TIP

I like to use A6 [4.1 x 5.8 in] cards and envelopes made from recycled kraft card—you can find packs of these in art shops.

Cut or tear a piece of lokta paper to fit on the front of the card. I like to hand-tear mine, using a ruler to help, as it leaves a pretty textured edge.

Place the lokta paper face down onto your acetate sheet and coat the back with a layer of glue.



Lift the paper off your acetate sheet and place the glued side onto your card. Firm it down.

Choose your flower or foliage and check that it fits on the lokta paper (trim to size if needed). I’ve chosen an astrantia flower for this card.

Place your pressing face down on your acetate sheet and use your paintbrush to apply the glue.

Using your tweezers, carefully lift the pressing off the acetate sheet and place it into position on your lokta paper.

Gently firm your pressing down. After a couple of minutes, check that all parts are adhered to the paper, and apply more glue if there are any edges lifting.

TIP

The astrantia flower I am using here has lots of fabulous tiny flowers in the centre that can become loose, so I'm also applying a layer of glue over the top of these to keep them in place.

Leave it to dry for 24 hours.

TIP

After it has been drying for an hour, you can pop a book on top to help keep it flat.

VARIATIONS

You can experiment with different types of paper, different sizes of card, or perhaps combining a pressed flower with a drawing or other decorations.

AUTUMN

Cosy, transformative, fierce autumn. As days shorten and stormy skies brew, the garden fills with hues of amber and gold and generously provides a feast of seeds, nuts, berries, and fruit to support the wildlife through the sparse months ahead. Drenched in jewels and charm, nature begins building sheltering cocoons and forming blankets of leaves for comfort and solace. Life gently exhales, preparing to fall into a beautiful slumber that will protect and enclose the magic within.

AUTUMN PRESSINGS

The colours of autumn are truly inspiring. At this time of year, leaves take centre stage for pressing; it's such a joy to fill a flower press with leaves that are transforming into hues of yellow, orange, red, and russet. There are so many incredible leaf shapes to find, and I'd encourage you to look both up to the branches and down to the ground to find an array of different inspiration. Leaves press really well, and there's a wealth of different creative projects that celebrate their beauty. Two of my favourite leaves to press are acers (also known as maples) and ginkgo biloba.

There are also still plenty of flowers to press, with many late-summer flowers continuing to bloom well into autumn. The arrival of stunning dahlia flowers is always a highlight. Dahlias do need to be pressed petal by petal, and so require some patience, but they are definitely worth it—the variety of colours and petal shapes is unrivalled.

It's also the perfect season to find interesting forms such as the flowing stems of ornamental grasses and fantastically fluffy seedheads.

These fabulously fluffy pressed clematis seedheads are really fascinating.

AUTUMN HIGHLIGHTS

Clematis seedheads
Cosmos
Dahlia
Fern
Fuchsia
Hydrangea
Japanese anemone
Leaves
Ornamental grasses
Perennial sunflower

Dazzling Japanese anemones.

AUTUMN PROJECT

Découpage Jam Jar

These pretty jars create a relaxing aesthetic.

The cosy season of autumn brings with it a desire to snuggle up and seek comfort. This fun project teaches you how to découpage a glass jar using pressed leaves and tissue paper—when you light a candle inside, it will give off a lovely warming glow. You can use any type of jar for this. I like to repurpose them from my store cupboard. Do be careful if you use a real candle—keep it out of reach of children when lit and never leave it unattended.

YOU WILL NEED

Paintbrush
Water-based white glue
Glass jar
Tweezers
Thin tissue paper, torn into small pieces
Pressed flowers or foliage
Acetate sheet
Ribbon or twine
Tealight candle

Using your paintbrush, apply a layer of glue onto a small section of your jar.

Using your tweezers, place a piece of the torn tissue paper onto the glue.

TIP

The tissue paper may wrinkle or crease—this is fine! It adds interest and texture.

Repeat, slightly overlapping the edges of the tissue paper until the whole of the outside of your jar is covered with a layer of tissue paper. Leave it for an hour to dry.

Choose your pressings, trimming them to size if needed, and decide on the design you'd like to create. Here I'm working with Virginia creeper and acer leaves.

TIP

Make sure you select pressings that are flexible enough to shape to the curve of the jar.

Place your pressing face down on your acetate sheet and use your paintbrush to apply the glue.

Using your tweezers, carefully lift the pressing off the acetate sheet and place it into position on your jar.

Gently firm your pressing down. After a couple of minutes, check that all parts are adhered to the paper, and apply more glue if there are any edges lifting.

Repeat for all of your pressings and, once complete, leave it to dry for an hour.

Using your paintbrush, apply a generous layer of glue over all of the pressings and tissue paper.

Leave it to dry for 24 hours.

TIP

Sit the jar on a bottle lid or similar item so that the base doesn't stick to the worktop whilst drying.

Decorate your jar with pretty ribbon or twine.

Place a candle inside the jar and light it for a wonderful cosy glow.

VARIATIONS

You can make these with different coloured tissue paper, or no tissue paper at all—simply adhere your flowers straight onto the glass. (I like to use tissue paper as it diffuses the light beautifully.) You can use pressed flowers instead of leaves, or perhaps festive foliage for a winter theme. They can be decorated with as many or as few pressings as you like. As an alternative to using a real candle, you could pop some fairy string lights into the jar—magical!

WINTER

Soft, muted, still winter. The garden sleeps, with precious plants quietly nestled within the safety of the soil, granting themselves time to slow and regather their energy to get ready for the year ahead. Fallen leaves and decaying stems softly decompose and descend back into the rich earth, nourishing the life harnessed within.

During these slow months with the biting cold, the velvety darkness, and the sparkling frosty days, nature gives itself permission to rest, content in the comfort of knowing the warmth and light will return.

WINTER PRESSINGS

Winter is the leanest time of year for flower pressing, but there is still plenty to be found; you may just need to look a little harder to find the secrets the season holds. Evergreen foliage is wonderfully reliable to press—ivy, eucalyptus, and bay are lovely to work with, as is mistletoe, if you are lucky enough to live in an area where it grows. (Choose mistletoe leaves without berries on them, as the berries will become a sticky mess if pressed!) I've also had some success with holly leaves: I pick leaves from higher up in the tree, as they are slightly less prickly!

Late winter brings two of my favourite flowers—hellebores and snowdrops. There's something miraculous about these flowers and how they are able to grow and bloom when so many other plants are still wrapped in their quiet slumber. They look so delicate, and yet they are incredibly robust and resilient flowers. Both are fairly high in moisture content, so I always use four layers of blotting paper on either side of them when pressing. I also leave them in the flower press for a little longer—four weeks—as my studio is cooler in the winter months and so they'll take more time to dry.

There are also other treasures to be discovered. Catkins press brilliantly, and can be shaped into enchanting dancing forms when placing them into your flower press. Seedheads that aren't too woody can also be pressed, and you can sometimes find fascinating ethereal skeleton leaves in amongst the winter detritus, which are formed when the veins of the leaf remain but the rest of it has decomposed—a truly awe-inspiring and captivating natural work of art!

Pressed festive foliage: mistletoe, ivy, and holly.

WINTER HIGHLIGHTS

Bay
Catkins
Eucalyptus
Hellebore
Holly
Ivy
Mistletoe
Skeleton leaves
Snowdrop

Marvellous mistletoe.

WINTER PROJECT

Festive Bauble

Making festive baubles is a great way to celebrate the festive season.

Beautiful handmade bauble ornaments make gorgeous gifts. They can feature festive foliage such as ivy and mistletoe; alternatively, they are just as lovely adorned with flowers from any season (this way they can be displayed all year long too, not just during winter celebrations). I love to use ivy leaves for these as they have really interesting patterns and shapes.

YOU WILL NEED

Pressed flowers or foliage
Tweezers
Blank ceramic bauble (you can find these in craft shops)
Twine
Acetate sheet
Water-based white glue
Paintbrush
Ribbon (optional)

Select the pressings you'd like to work with and check that they are a good size for your bauble (trim to size if needed). The baubles look great with just one or two pressings, or covered with a whole patchwork of different flowers—be creative! I'm using ivy leaves for this one.

TIP

Thin, flexible pressings will shape better to the rounded surface of the bauble—thicker or woody pressings are likely to break.

Tie some twine onto the bauble to allow you to hang it as it dries. The twine can be replaced with ribbon at the end.

Place your pressing face down on your acetate sheet and apply glue to the back with your paintbrush.

TIP

You may find you need to use a slightly thicker layer of glue for surfaces such as ceramics or clay compared to when working on paper.

Lift the pressing off the acetate sheet using your tweezers and place it onto the bauble. Gently encourage it into place, applying light pressure with your fingers to firm it down.

Leave it for two minutes, then check that your pressing is well adhered to the bauble—if any edges are lifting, apply some extra glue underneath and firm it down until it stays in place. Repeat steps 3–5 for all of the pressings you are adding to the bauble. Once all of your pressings are in place, leave it to dry for an hour to allow the glue to set.

Using your paintbrush, neatly apply a generous layer of glue over the whole surface of the bauble—this will help to protect the pressings when handled.

TIP

This step can get a bit messy—you can always coat half, leave it to dry, and then coat the other half.

Hang your bauble by the twine for 24 hours to dry.

If you'd like, you can replace the twine with some pretty ribbon for an elegant finishing touch.

VARIATIONS

You could try using different shaped baubles, painting the baubles before adding your pressings, or perhaps adding a luxurious touch of gold leaf.

CHAPTER 09

Sustainability and Mindful Living

SUSTAINABLE GARDENING

There are a few simple sustainable practices that I'd encourage you to incorporate into your gardening approach to help your garden and the environment to thrive.

Water is a vital resource, and with increasingly extreme climatic events, it's more important than ever to collect rainwater to water our plants, rather than relying on tap water. Rainwater is much better for our gardens, as it doesn't include the chemicals that tap water does. If you have space, water butts or barrels connected to guttering are a great way to harvest water. It doesn't have to be complicated—leaving your watering can or even some repurposed tubs outside when it rains will collect water, which can then be used to irrigate your plants on dry days. Water in a garden is hugely important for wildlife, so if you have the space I'd really encourage you create a wildlife pond—even small ponds provide a haven for a multitude of different creatures.

Turning my compost pile to encourage decomposition.

Nature gardening is a quiet yet powerful way to help our planet, and ourselves, to heal and thrive. Imagine if every human being spent time nurturing a little patch of ground, a balcony, or a window box, working with *nature rather than trying to fight it. It would create wildlife corridors even in urban areas, and every one of us would benefit from the proven restorative power of reconnecting with our natural surroundings.*

Composting is another brilliant way to help the planet and your garden. Fruit and vegetable scraps, plant off-cuts, paper (including your blotting paper once it's no longer useable!), grass cuttings, hedge clippings, and any pressed flowers that aren't good enough to use in your creations can all be composted. Over time—usually within a year, but often quicker under optimum conditions—the organic matter you place in a compost bin will

break down and turn into gorgeous nutrient-rich goodness that can then be used in your plant pots or spread onto your garden soil to give it a nutrient boost. Compost bins don't have to be glamorous; in their simplest form, you can just create a pile of compost material somewhere in the garden, and leave it to work its magic! It's such a fascinating process, and a fantastic way to reduce food waste.

I've already mentioned how nature gardening gives you a great excuse to have an 'untidy' garden, but to really enhance your garden space, it's great to actively create as many habitats as you can. Build piles of sticks and leaves for insects and mammals to hide in and hang bird and bat boxes. If you have the space, plant a tree. It's also great to let some areas of grass grow long and leave some parts of the garden completely untouched. These small acts make a huge difference for the wonderful wildlife that we share our gardens with.

Chemical pesticides are terrible for nature, and completely unnecessary. If you create the right ecosystem, your garden will attract in its own natural pest control. Ladybirds will remove aphids for you and birds will eat caterpillars, slugs, and snails. If you do find that some plants get eaten or leaves nibbled, I'd encourage you to reframe your perspective, and delight in the fact that your garden is attracting some of the incredible creatures that we share the planet with—*you* have created a space where nature is choosing to live—isn't that amazing?

LIVING WITH PURPOSE

I hope this book has inspired you and that you feel empowered to grant yourself permission to be free and confident in your creativity and expression.

Every single flower pressing and creation is completely full of splendour and awe, and a humble reminder that there is beauty everywhere, especially in the simplest and purest of moments.

If you are able to plant a seed, help it grow, and press a flower that blooms from it, the feeling of gratitude towards nature becomes even stronger, reaffirming that we are an intrinsic part of our natural surroundings and we have the ability to positively impact the world. Growing your own flowers for pressing not only brings fulfilment and enjoyment for yourself, it also has a ripple effect; you are providing bees and other pollinators with nectar, insects with shelter, birds with food, and improving the soil and purifying the air. You are creating magic, whilst also benefiting your mind, body, and soul.

Traditional flower pressing teaches us many skills: being present in the moment, appreciating beauty, noticing, slowing the mind, patience, and the joy of simple pleasures. It is a perfect way to practice mindfulness and a gentle ritual of self-care. I hope that the humble act of flower pressing will allow you to learn to feel fully alive in the present moment.

The true gifts will then follow, as once you learn this skill, your brain will start to use the same techniques in other aspects of your life. You'll start to notice once-hidden depths, beauty, and details in the world around you, and appreciate life and existence on a different, much more connected level. I hope you find yourself gifted with new perspectives to help you to live life with purpose, get outside, breathe deeply, touch the earth, and embrace each day. I wish you every success on your transformative, enlightening journey into the art of flower pressing.

Pressed wildflowers (forget-me-nots, buttercups, cow parsley, purple loosestrife, daisies, and Queen Anne’s lace) arranged in my ‘wild bouquet’ style.

About the Author

Sarah Holland is a pressed-flower artist based in Worcestershire, United Kingdom, best known for her esteemed atelier, Meadow and Thyme.

Working with flowers lovingly grown in her wildlife garden and traditionally pressed in her studio, Sarah creates stunning artwork and other creations that celebrate the ephemeral beauty of nature.

With a passion for sustainability and slow, seasonal living, Sarah has a profound connection to her work and a deep love for all things wild and floral.

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So many wonderful people have been part of my floral journey. Thank you to all who have gifted words of gentle encouragement; little moments that cumulatively had a big impact and helped me to believe in myself.

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Finally, thank you to Pip, who was there through darker times to lift me up and help me to spread my wings. Your kindness will never be forgotten.

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For Granny. Your love shines through in every flower.

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